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VILLAGE POLITICS.



VILLAGE POLITICS:

ADDRESSES AND SERMONS

ON

THE LABOUR QUESTION.

BY

CHARLES WILLIAM STUBBS, M.A.,
VICAR OF GRANBOOUGH, BUCKS.



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**R. CLAY, SONS, AND TAYLOR, PRINTERS,
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Dedicated

TO THE FARM LABOURERS OF ENGLAND

IN SINCERE SYMPATHY

WITH THEIR STRUGGLE TOWARDS CITIZENSHIP

THROUGH SELF-RELIANCE AND ASSOCIATION.



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VILLAGE POLITICS.

"IF anything in the world is evident, surely it is evident that a Christian minister ought to strive with all his power to render the Lord's prayer something better than a mockery to the poor labourers to whom he teaches it. Yet how can he teach them to pray to a Father at all, with any feeling of sacredness attaching to the name, if the only father they know is a beast of burden—far dirtier and far worse housed than most of the farmer's horses? How can he teach them to pray that God's name be hallowed, if the only bedroom in the house is crowded with blasphemous and dissolute lodgers, whose small weekly payment is essential to the very life of the household? How is he to teach them to pray that God's kingdom may come and His will be done, while clergymen themselves seem to regard a condition of things in which hunger and vice play into each other's hands, as a very fair, though only 'gradual' approximation to that kingdom and that will? How is he to teach them to pray for daily bread without helping them to get the wages which alone can pay for it? How is he to inculcate the prayer for forgiveness in proportion as they have forgiven, on men who have had to struggle like the beasts in the conflict for existence, without moral room or opportunity for that comparison of their own hearts with those of others on which even the sense of justice, and much more the sense of mercy, must depend? How is he to teach young men and women to pray against being led

into temptation, who are crowded into the grossest and most degrading temptations by the mere conditions of their life and sleep? How is he to teach those to pray to be delivered from evil, who are delivered soul and body to evil when they enter their homes? and how is he to teach them to believe that it is God's kingdom, power, and glory under which they live, who see the only beneficent power they can distinctly realise, 'the Union'—visited with the grave displeasure of the Church, and who are told that it is for God's glory that they should not murmur against a lot that soils their very souls."—*The Spectator*, September 20, 1873.

VILLAGE POLITICS.

I

THE LABOUR QUESTION IN 1872.

(A VILLAGE LECTURE.¹)

“To him that worketh, reward is reckoned not of grace,
but of debt.”—ST. PAUL.

WHEN I happened to mention to a friend the other day my intention of preparing the present lecture on certain questions of agricultural economy, I was immediately met with the caution, “You must be very careful what you say. Farmers, remember, are a very

¹ Delivered in the Parish Schoolroom, Granborough. Nov.
21, 1872.

touchy race. You will find that they easily take offence."

Now, although that caution has been uttered to me in one form or another more than once during the last few weeks, it has not succeeded, you perceive, in warning me away from what so many appear to consider a dangerous subject. And it has not succeeded, for this reason amongst others,—Because I am strongly of opinion that the number of those men in any class is becoming increasingly smaller who cannot bear to listen to opinions contrary to their own, provided that they are aware that the speaker is honest in his convictions, states them, however plainly, yet with due courtesy and moderation, and above all, makes no endeavour to thrust them dogmatically upon those who are not willing to accept them. With regard to those few, however, though I trust it is not possible that such may be present, who cannot tolerate any opinion contrary to their own, in whatever manner it may

be stated, well, perhaps the sooner they do learn that lesson of toleration the better for themselves and everybody else concerned. I do not, however, anticipate giving offence to any one at all. I think most of you know me sufficiently well by this time to be aware that, however strongly I may sometimes appear to state opinions about which I feel strongly, yet that I am at any rate anxious always to do so in the spirit of fairness and impartiality. No doubt I may have to say some things with which the farmers will not be altogether disposed to agree. If it should so happen, let me beg of them to bear with me till the close of my lecture, and then, if they will convince me of my error, I trust I shall be honest enough to confess that I have been so convinced. In the same way, if I happen to say anything, as in all likelihood I shall, with which the labourers may not be altogether pleased, I promise them that, at the close of the lecture, I shall be equally ready to be by them convinced of my error likewise.

So much, then, by way of explanation of the spirit in which I have endeavoured to come to the consideration of this subject, and in which I trust you are prepared to receive what I have written.

Two other possible objections may perhaps be best met here by way of preface to the main subject. There are those who, in addition to the caution I have already alluded to, have also called in question, firstly, the utility of raising publicly this subject at all, and, secondly, even granting the utility, they have questioned the advisability of such a work being undertaken by a clergyman.

I think those two objections are sufficiently common to merit a word or two in reply. "Let the subject alone and it will soon wear itself out. If the flame were not fanned by meddlers outside it would soon die away." To some such phrases as those I think you will all confess to have listened at one time or another lately. "Whoever else may consider

that they have a right to speak in this matter, the parson at any rate has no call to interfere," is the expression of a sentiment with which the clergy themselves at any rate have been more or less conversant lately.

Let me say a word or two upon those opinions. And in answer to those who would urge the advisability of stifling all public discussion of this question of Agricultural Labour, I would ask them to consider whether in their knowledge any great popular agitation was ever yet smothered in that way? From the days when Gamaliel commanded the wise men of Jerusalem to refrain from interfering with those fishermen-agitators of Galilee, and "to let them alone," to our own day, when the Apostolic successor of those fishermen suggested the horse-pond as a convenient mode of drowning the opinions of union agitators, I think you will find that the stifling course has never succeeded.

Neither will you be able to put a stop to this

agitation by pretending to ignore it, any more than the ostrich, according to the old story, was able to escape its enemies by burying its head in the sand, congratulating itself meanwhile that because it could not see them they could not see it. Believe me, if any man has a grievance, or, what is equally as bad, fancies he has a grievance, the most effectual way to put a stop to it is to let him speak it out, show him that he is wrong if you can, and at any rate do not let him nurse the idea that you can't prove him to be wrong, because you won't listen to what he has got to say. If you are confident of being in the right, it can certainly do no harm to yourself or anybody else to be open and straightforward. And if you happen even to be proved to be mistaken, your open challenge will at least prove that you were honestly unconscious of it. Nothing is ever lost by open and fair discussion, and much is generally gained if not always in the way of actual settlement, at any rate in the encouragement

of that spirit of toleration and charity which tends to make future settlement possible. Freedom of discussion, what is it, after all, but the very spirit of England and Englishmen? And is it not simply because freedom of discussion has been smothered in some other countries that such social catastrophes as those we have heard so much of lately have taken place? Nothing is to be lost, and everything is to be gained, by open discussion. And therefore in this agitation about the condition of the Agricultural Labourer, nothing, in my opinion, has done so much to foster ill-feeling between employers and employed as the almost general attempt on the part of the former, either to ignore it as much as possible altogether, or where that was not feasible, to resist it as stubbornly as they could. I may cite as an instance of the folly of this course of action a remark that was made to me by a member, an active member, of the Agricultural Union the other day. "I am glad, sir, we have met

with so much opposition. You see, persecution only helps us on. Let the farmers turn off our men. It will only increase our power in the end." Now, however much you may regret the spirit of that speech, I suppose you will allow there is worldly wisdom at the bottom of it.

On the ground then of mere self-interest, if for no other, I would maintain that attempts to ignore or to stifle this agitation are mistaken. And, therefore, because I hold that opinion I have ventured to call you together to-night, believing that it would be much better that, when you have heard both sides of the question, as far, that is, as I may be able to state them, you may express your opinions openly, rather than that you should run the risk of altogether misunderstanding one another because you had no means of really knowing what each of you was possibly thinking in secret.

And now, one word in answer to those who are of opinion that I, as a clergyman, had better have left this matter alone. I suppose

such an opinion is generally based on the idea that the clergyman is departing from the true conception of his office when he leaves the purely spiritual teaching of his people to meddle with what is called their secular life. Now without entering into a discussion of that question, which would be out of place here, I will merely state that I cannot accept such a conception of the duties of the clerical office. I am aware that my view is not shared by perhaps even a majority of the clergy. But I rejoice to think that the number of those is, at any rate, not small, who though they consider that the highest message which they are commissioned to bear to men is one having to do essentially with another world than this, yet believe that to this present world they are ordained to carry the message of the righteous government of a present God. If we all of us carried this belief of ours to its logical conclusion, we should seldom, I fancy, be in much doubt as to what was, or what was not, legiti-

mate for a clergyman to do for the merely secular welfare, so to speak, of his parishioners. Nothing surely which in any way is tending towards the education of men, whether socially or individually, can be without interest or instruction for the man who believes that God is really the orderer and guide of human life; no subject that bears in any sense upon the revelation of the laws of that Divine government, whether for the moment those laws be called laws of social science, or political economy, of politics, of commerce, of agriculture, could be without interest for him, or could be considered to be out of place in his teaching. I know of no subject, in fact, which from its nature can be excluded from the course of clerical teaching, but only from its spirit.

And therefore, I say boldly, that it appears to me not only the duty of the clergy to speak out wisely and clearly upon this subject of Agricultural Labour, as it is their duty to speak out in all social crises whatever, according

to their ability; but it is their duty to study the laws of political economy—where they do not already know them—so that they may make such advice as they may give to both sides not only earnest and well-intentioned, but reasonable and wise. If the clergyman will but take the trouble to study these questions carefully I am sure he need find himself under no temptation to speak only to the one side of the question. The right or the wrong is very seldom indeed, if ever, in class questions, altogether on the one side. I am sure it is not in this present agitation. If on the one hand the clergyman may with perfect truth point to the condition of the labourers, and assert that it is certainly not an inevitable law of nature that he should remain a mere appendage to the land, a child in leading strings, who has no rights of his own, taught to regard any effort to combine for an advance in wages as simply wicked, and contrary to the plain definition of Scripture, on the other hand he may

also warn the labourer that with the rights of independence he must also be prepared to accept its duties and responsibilities, to prove that while he wishes to gain the fair day's wage, he does not intend to withhold the fair day's work; in a word, to prove himself worthy of being called a free man, by practising the free virtues—justice, honesty, thrift, self-denial, self-reliance, self-government.

So much, then, by way of preface to our main subject, "The Condition of the Agricultural Labourer." What, then, is the condition of the Agricultural Labourer? That is a question I think which may very naturally furnish us with a starting-point.

The more usual plan, I believe, in any endeavour to arrive at an accurate description of the present position of the farm labourer is to begin by describing what his condition was at a period as far removed as possible from our own times. I might perhaps follow this precedent with a certain amount of convenience:

to myself. I might go back as far then even as the Domesday Book, and tell you of the days when this parish of Granborough of ours—Grenesberga, as they called it then, the green-hill, that is to say—was dedicated to God and St. Alban by Egelwyne the Swarte and Wynflede his wife, in the time of Edward, the last before the Conquest, how it was considered that there was land enough for seven ploughs and two teams, how, to quote the words of Domesday Book itself, “In the demesne were two hides, and two ploughs, and seven villeins with four bordars had seven ploughs, one servant and pasture for two teams.” I might describe to you how the seven villeins mentioned there represent the seven agricultural labourers of the Granborough of that day; and if you ask me what sort of condition was theirs, I might tell you how the villein, or farm labourer of that day, was nothing more than a serf, or slave, considered to be just as much the property of the landowner as

the two teams which pulled the Grenesbergan ploughs. If the landowner chose to sell his land, his labourers were sold with it. If the landowner was in want of pocket-money, he had only to catch a few agricultural labourers, and sell *them*, and his purse was replenished, though not, as it would appear, to any great extent, for farm labourers don't seem to have been of any great money value in the market even then. Altogether the powers of the master over his slave were very extensive: the villein in fact had nothing which he could call his own. Two principal privileges, indeed, he did possess. If he happened to be killed by his master, he had, at least, the satisfaction of knowing that the King would be enriched by the exaction of a certain fine. And if his master should happen to knock out his eye or his tooth, which appears to have been not altogether an uncommon occurrence in those days, the labourer had a right to claim his freedom in exchange. From which facts I may leave

you to consider whether you may not have reason for congratulation that you live in the days of Queen Victoria, and not in the days of Edward the last before the Conquest.

But perhaps I ought not to have gone back quite so far as Domesday Book. The year 1685 may be far enough—the days of Charles II.—that is more or less a favourite period with those who are partial to those researches, which go to prove what a paradise is England now to all conditions of men, from the highest to the lowest, compared with what it was a couple of hundred years ago. Besides, Lord Macaulay has devoted a whole chapter in his History of England to the state of England in the year 1685; and that you see is convenient for those who are not partial to personal investigation. It is pleasant to have one's facts all ready cut and dried for one, especially when they fit in so well with our own preconceived ideas. And Lord Macaulay has certainly in that chapter collected some very

interesting facts as to the condition and wages of the Agricultural Labourer. And if you like to read that chapter I am sure you will only be too ready to agree that the condition of the farm labourer in 1685 was very bad indeed, and his wages shockingly low. Here is a fact or two. "Sir William Petty informs us that a labourer was by no means in the lowest state who received for a day's work 4*d.* with food, or 8*d.* without food; 4*s.* a week therefore were fair agricultural wages." Again, "In 1661, the justices at Chelmsford had fixed the wages of the Essex labourer, who was not boarded, at 6*s.* in the winter, and 7*s.* in summer. This seems to have been the highest remuneration given in the kingdom for agricultural labour between the Restoration and the Revolution; and it is to be observed that in the year in which this order was made, the necessaries of life were immoderately dear: wheat was at 7*os.* the quarter."

Now these of course are all very instructive

facts; but, on the whole, I am not very sure that they actually affect the present condition of the labourer at all. For, after all, the interesting question to the labourer of our own day is not so much whether his condition is so much better than the condition of his ancestor in the times of the Domesday Survey, or in 1685, or in 1785, or even twenty-five years ago, but what is his condition to-day? Is that satisfactory? If you leave him to answer that question for himself, there is no doubt what his answer will be. It is not satisfactory. And if you ask me what my answer to that question is, I answer: It is not satisfactory. And if you ask me further what are my grounds for such an opinion, I will answer that I cannot consider the condition of any man in England satisfactory who has nothing to look forward to in sickness or in old age but the workhouse: who, when he is willing to work, and is starving for want of work, is unable to procure it, except, perhaps, as a

matter of charity: who is obliged to live, or is willing to live in houses where the very first principles of morality, cleanliness, decency, modesty are impossible. I cannot consider the condition of that man satisfactory of whose sleeping-rooms it is possible in any case to be able to say (I read the words only yesterday), "In the thatch-covered roof of a single-roomed cottage—a loft ten feet square—three beds contained ten people; there were no curtains or divisions of any kind: one bed held the father, mother, and infant son; the centre bed was occupied by three daughters, of whom two were upwards of twenty years of age; and in the third bed lay the four sons, aged respectively seventeen, fifteen, fourteen, and ten." In a word, I cannot consider the condition of that man satisfactory who has no hope, no prospect, nothing to look forward to, no chance of improving his position, but must rest satisfied with such improvement as may come to him from outside, from that

common heritage of mankind, the progress of civilisation. And this I consider to be a not unfair picture of the condition of the agricultural labourer in 1872. I will assume then, if you please, that it is not satisfactory.

Now, having made that assumption, the next question is evidently to ask:—Is anybody responsible for this unsatisfactory state of things, and, if so, who is?

Some of the labourers and their advisers have a ready answer here. “Yes, the farmers are responsible; they are the cause of this bad state of things. Let the farmers give us higher wages, let them give us a fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work, and everything will come right.” I wish I could think that that answer was the true one. If it were so, the solution of this question would be simple indeed. But, unfortunately, it is not so.

Let me try to explain to you why it is not. It is without doubt quite true that the condition of the labourer cannot be very materially

improved unless his wages are increased ; and it is also undoubtedly true that the condition of the labourer at present is very unsatisfactory ; but it is not equally true that either of those conditions is altogether the fault of the farmer or of the employer of labour. And for this reason, because the will or caprice of the farmer, or of the employer of labour, is not the only thing that regulates wages. I think it is most important that you should recognise this. For, in these discussions and agitations that have been going on lately, it has been too often assumed that the rate of wages is altogether a matter depending on the will or caprice of the employer. And so it has come about that the farmer has been denounced as if he alone were to blame for allowing his selfishness to rob the labourer of his due reward. An amount of ill-feeling on both sides has thus been engendered, which must always be a matter of deep regret to all right thinking people, and which also tends both to complicate and embitter any attempt to bring

about a more satisfactory state of things. It is important, therefore, that you should see that the rate of wages depends upon something else besides the caprice of the employer.

Consider for a moment. What is wages? It is the price at which you agree to sell your labour. Farmers and labourers are simply buyers and sellers of a certain commodity called labour. The farmer has got a certain amount of money. The labourer has got a certain amount of labour. They desire to make a fair exchange. The price which will be fixed upon as a fair equivalent for the labour will be, or ought to be, settled in exactly the same way as the price of any commodity which is sold in a shop. The fair price is just simply what it will fetch in the open market. It will be regulated, that is to say, by the law of supply and demand.

The farmer wants to get labour, and to get it as cheaply as possible. The labourer wants to get money, and to get as much as possible. Now suppose that for any reason the demand

for labour on the part of the farmers is very active, rather than be deprived of the labour on which his profits depend, the farmer will outbid his fellows in order to secure as many men as he wants. Wages will be high in consequence. On the other hand, suppose, from any cause, the supply of labourers is great, and the demand for labour is small, the labourers, rather than go without money, on which their living depends, will underbid one another, and wages will be low in consequence. Thus, when the demand is great and the supply is small, wages will be high. When the supply is great, and the demand is small, wages will be low. And this is what is meant by saying that the rate of wages is regulated by the law of supply and demand.

Before I go any farther let me beg of you to remember this fact. Since the employer of labour is merely the buyer of a certain commodity called labour, he is no more obliged to buy than is any other purchaser obliged to buy *goods* of which he is not in want. It rests

entirely with himself whether he chooses to buy or not. Because a certain tradesman, in Winslow, for example, has a certain stock of goods, say new hats, and I have a certain amount of money, and am badly in want of a new hat, I suppose you would not go so far as to say that I ought to buy a hat from him against my will. If I choose to go about in a shabby hat it may be very foolish of me, and altogether inconsistent with proper feelings of what is due to the fashion; but, after all, that is no reason why the Winslow hatter should consider himself aggrieved because I won't relieve him of his surplus stock. Now I think it is important to recognise clearly this principle. For working men too often argue quite contrary to it. Because they happen to have certain labour which they want to sell, and a certain farmer, as they suppose, is very much in want of it, they immediately rush to the conclusion—he ought to employ me. There is really no 'ought' in the matter.

It is quite possible that there may be some present here who will not be altogether satisfied with that explanation of things. I find that it is common amongst those who are agitating this question on the side of the labourer to call in question altogether the teaching of Political Economy, and the law of supply and demand. I do not think, therefore, that we ought to consider that we have settled the question when we have told the labourer, "It is altogether a matter of supply and demand. You must leave it to settle itself." It was only the other day that I read in the pages of the *Farm Labourers' Chronicle*, the organ of this present agitation, the following statement of this feeling on the part of the advisers of the Agricultural Labourer:—"For some time we have been bored with the words 'the law of supply and demand.' No sooner had the farm labourer made his cry of suffering heard by the public, demonstrated that he was living at the edge of *starvation*, that he was the victim of injustice,

that he was down-trodden in the very mire of degradation, and helpless under the heels of the farmer, than we began to hear the cuckoo-cry —‘It is the law of supply and demand.’ So then this law of supply and demand is a mere *bête noir* to throw at a poor man’s head—a sort of charm to be said oracularly when you cannot say anything else in reply to the short and simple annals of the poor—their sad tale of suffering, shame, and want.”

Now, though of course I cannot admire the tone of those words, I must confess there is a certain amount of truth in the objection raised, which is not always remembered by those who urge the law of supply and demand as the sole regulator of wages. It is too often forgotten that the law of supply and demand is only a fair regulator of wages when there is perfect freedom of market on the side of both buyer and seller of labour.

There are two sides to every bargain. And no bargain can altogether be said to be a just

one in which one or other of the parties to it has not perfect freedom of choice. It is not to be supposed that that can be considered a fair bargain in which the price of the commodity is fixed by the buyer, and the seller is allowed no word in the matter. And this undoubtedly has been the case, to a greater or a less extent with the labour of the farm workman. It cannot be quite justly said that he has been in a position to make the best bargain open to him in the matter of selling his labour. He has been prevented from doing so, first, by the actual operation of the Poor-laws, which, until lately, have practically tied him to one particular district and prevented him from carrying his labour to the best market; and secondly, by the poverty of his condition, which has prevented him from acquiring the means necessary to change his home, and has left him without the sense or the spirit to do so, even if he had the means. In a word, the conditions for the free exercise of the law of supply and demand have in his case been

wanting ; and he has been up to the present time the victim of circumstances, chiefly the result of mistaken legislation, from which there seemed little chance of his extricating himself.

Twelve months ago, I suppose, that man would have been laughed at who should have dared to prophesy that, in the course of a few months, the agricultural labourer should not only have made an unexpected effort to change his condition, but that the agitation which he should thus have caused should have become one of the most interesting and remarkable social events of the year 1872. To-day, at any rate, it would be idle to doubt the truth of what Mr. Arch stated in a speech to certain agricultural labourers at Fairford only last Thursday,—“At the present moment you and I, as a body of agricultural labourers, are talked about in England more to-day than ever we were in the previous history of the world. I believe the reason why we are talked about at agriculturists’ dinners, in bishops’ palaces, over the dinner

tables of the aristocracy, and I may say by members of Parliament, upon almost every occasion when they meet, is because we have dared, in the year of our Lord 1872, to come before the British public, whose chief causes we so nobly serve, whose wealth we labour to produce and to protect, and assert our rights as Englishmen by virtue of combination."

It would be quite needless for me, if I could spare the time, to describe to you the various steps by which that agitation has gradually assumed its present proportions. At the present time branches in connection with the Agricultural Labourers' Union are established in nearly half the counties in England. At the half-yearly meeting of the executive committee of the Union, held at Leamington, it was stated that the members are supposed to exceed 350,000. With this simple fact before us it must be quite evident that to endeavour to put a stop to this movement, even if it were desirable to do so, by pretending to ignore its existence,

is simply ridiculous. The movement has not only begun, but has already succeeded in thoroughly establishing itself, and must go on now, for good or evil, in spite of any and all opposition. There are, of course, I am well aware, those who consider that there is nothing but unmixed evil in this agitation, who can only consider the trade unions of our day as Lord Bacon did the trade guilds of his, as simple "fraternities of evil." There may possibly be even present some who may hold that opinion. I certainly cannot agree with them. The right of the labourers to form unions is not only established by law, but such a law is based upon principles both of natural justice and common sense. The labourers have naturally just as much a right to join a union, if they think such an organisation is likely to improve their condition, and to secure for them the conditions most favourable for labour, as the masters have to combine to improve or maintain their position, and to secure for themselves the conditions most

I hold in my hands a copy of the Constitution and Rules of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union, and I must honestly confess that, having read those rules through as carefully as I could, I certainly can find in them nothing to which any impartial reader could seriously take objection. And I do not hesitate to say that if the spirit of moderation and fairness which characterises that paper be adhered to by all who subscribe to the union rules, we can expect nothing of any great danger from this movement. And, as a fact, I think it must be allowed on all hands that, as far as the present agitation has gone as yet, the agricultural labourer has conducted it in a strictly peaceable and law-abiding manner.

Let me read to you a sentence or two from the introduction, which bears the signature of Joseph Arch, the President of the Union, the founder and pioneer of the movement :—

Our movement (he says) has begun well. Success is, under God, in our own hands. Let us cleave to and work

for the Union. Let peace and moderation mark all our meetings. Let courtesy, fairness, and firmness characterise all our demands. Act cautiously, and advisedly, that no act may have to be repented or repudiated. Do not strike unless all other means fail you. Try all other means ; try them with firmness and patience ; try them in the enforcement of only just claims ; and if they all fail, then strike, and, having observed Rule 10, strike with a will. Fraternise, Centralise ! With brotherly feeling, with an united front, with every district welded into a great whole, with a common fund to which all shall pay, and on which all shall have the right to draw, the time will not be distant when every agricultural labourer shall have, what few, as yet, have enjoyed, a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. Nine and a half hours, exclusive of meal times, as a day's work, and 16s. as a week's pay are not extravagant demands. Society supports you in making them, and they will be met soon. Brothers, be united, and you will be strong ; be temperate, and you will be respected ; realise a central capital, and you will be able to act with firmness and independence. Many eyes are upon you ; many tongues are ready to reproach you ; your opponents say that your extra leisure will be passed in the public-house, and your extra pay spent in beer. Show that their slander is untrue ! Be united, be sober, and you will soon be free !

The Rule 10 to which he alludes is the rule which sets forth the mode which, in the opinion

of the Union, should be adopted in the settlement of all disputes between employers and employed. It runs thus :—

All cases of dispute between the members of the National Agricultural Union and their employers must be laid before the branch committee to which such members may belong ; and should the branch committee be unable to arrange the question to the mutual satisfaction of the parties interested, in conjunction with the district committee, recourse shall be had to arbitration. Should the district committee be unable to arrange for such arbitration, an appeal shall be made to the National Executive Committee for its decision. Any award made by arbitration or by decision of the National Executive shall be binding upon all members of the Union ; and in no case shall a strike be resorted to, until the above means have been tried and failed.

Having said so much, there may be perhaps those who would be inclined to put this question to me pointedly, “Do you consider that the Agricultural Union is altogether a good thing ? an organisation certain to bring about the best interests of the labourer ?” I must honestly confess that I find that a very difficult question to answer.

I have already expressed to you plainly my opinion that, as far as the right of joining the Union is concerned, there can be no doubt. The labourer has every bit as much right to join a union, and, for the matter of that, to strike for higher wages, as the farmer has to talk over the matter of wages at the market dinner, or to turn off one of his men if he thinks he has no work for him to do. If the labourer thinks he can improve his position, or insure the safety of his present position, by joining a society for that purpose ; he is simply following the same dictate of common sense as the farmer is when he thinks fit to insure his cow's life, or his own life in an insurance society. There can be no doubt about the right of joining the Union, the only question is its wisdom. I am also disposed to grant you this further. That under existing circumstances, it may be quite possible that no other means except the Union would be able to give to the agricultural labourers what they have certainly a right to demand—a free and

open market for their labour. And as I said just now, I do not certainly think that hitherto the agricultural labourer has had altogether fair play in that matter. He has not been, and in many cases he is not even now, in such a position that he can make the best bargain open to him in the matter of selling his labour. It is quite possible, therefore, that the Agricultural Union, though not by any means the best possible form by which social inequalities and unfairness may be remedied, is yet nearly the only means towards that end.

I have just stated, you see, my opinion that the Union is not the best possible form by which a better position might be insured to the labouring man than that in which he is now placed. You will expect me therefore to give my reasons for that opinion. If I had time I think I could easily give you several. I will give you one at least, which is certainly with me the radical one. It is this:—I consider it is not the best form, for this very simple reason, because, from the

necessity of the case, the organisation of a trade union, with its necessary concomitant the strike, must necessarily foster a feeling of antagonism between the employer and the employed. And therefore I welcome with joy all those various schemes of co-operation and industrial partnership of which we are hearing so much lately, because, as it seems to me, they are founded on a true principle, where unionism is founded at any rate on an unstable one, that the truest interests of both employers and workpeople are identical.

In speaking of the trade union I always feel that I am speaking doubtfully. I am speaking of something which, with all the good it has done, and I believe is still doing, has still always in the background a certain amount of evil, something which it is necessary to qualify, to hesitate about, to find apologies for. In speaking of co-operation, and the principle of industrial partnership, I have no such doubt and no such hesitancy. And I do not hesitate to say plainly to the employers of labour, that if they are not

prepared to give in to the principles of the Trade Union, they certainly must give in to the principles of co-operation or industrial partnership. I feel quite sure that as things go on the farmers will find it to be to their best interests to introduce their labourers to profits, not in the accustomed shape of wages, but in the actual unaccustomed shape of share in profits. But before I enter into the consideration of how far it would be possible for the farmer to adopt some modification at any rate of the partnership principle in his relations with his workpeople, let me describe to you an actual scheme which has been at work now successfully since the year 1829, not on the principle of industrial partnership between master and men, but on the more advanced principle of co-operation between the men themselves. I allude to the co-operative farms established by the late Mr. John Gurdon at Assington, in Suffolk. I will quote his own words, spoken before the Social Science Congress at York in 1864 :—

He stated that in order to raise the condition of the labourer in his class, and lift him above poverty and the crime that springs from it, he was induced in the year 1829 to let an off-hand farm of 100 acres, more or less, to twenty labourers of his parish; offering to lend them capital without interest to cultivate the same, subject to rules and regulations, as follows :—That each member should advance £2 as guarantee ; that a manager, accountant, and stock-keeper be elected for conducting the farm ; that the capital be paid back as the profits arose ; that quarterly meetings be held for transacting business, &c. ; that all necessary articles be provided by the committee for the use of the members ; that if any member be convicted of fraud, or any other crime, he should forfeit his share, which should be sold, and the moneys arising therefrom should form a reserve fund for contingencies. Other salutary rules were added as to advancing members—in case of unforeseen misfortunes—loans upon their shares, the disposal at death of such shares, filling up vacancies, &c. Upon the members subscribing these rules (Mr. Gurdon continued) I agreed to let the farm for the rent of land letting at that time, to be altered every twelve years during my life. . . . After a few years this society paid me off all the capital I had lent them, which induced me to let another isolated farm to thirty-four other members. This society has also paid off the moneys I lent them ; so there are now on the two farms fifty-four labourers farming about 350 acres free of debt, and possessing, as

their own property, all the stock and crops on the said land ; and as each share has been valued at £50, I have bestowed upon these fifty-four labourers the sum of £2,700 at the only loss of the interest of some £1,000 for a few years. Farmers at first were startled at my project ; but when they found I was not taking their labourers out of their former position, that they had the use of the men as before, only a certain number being required for the cultivation of the farms, and that they, moreover, had men they could depend upon, because conviction of any theft would deprive them of their share in the farms, and also that these labourers were exempt from any parish allowance, they altered their tone, and were willing to confess that the plan had every advantage without one drawback. The societies have established a store shop, and I hear they expect to pay their rents from their savings, by paying ready money, and getting every article at cost price. From the numberless letters I have received from practical economists, not only in England but in many parts of the Continent, I feel sure that the plan will be adopted. I have frequently attended their annual meetings and been much struck with their business habits and shrewd remarks, while their better mode of living gives them power to fulfil their work with spirit and energy. I should add, that no land is better farmed, or rents more punctually paid, than by these labourers.—*Transactions of Social Science Association*, 1864.

It is, I am sure, very much to be hoped that other landlords will follow the example of Mr. Gurdon, when they see how much good may be done, at the expense of very little trouble and no risk. Of one such example, at any rate, I have heard within the last few days. Lord Nelson, in an address which he issued a few weeks back to the labourers working on his estate, expresses his intention of following Mr. Gurdon's good example. You will perhaps allow me to read his words :—

I will also endeavour [he says] to start a co-operative farm, and other means of investment for savings, as soon as more of my people have saved money. The capital should be all subscribed by the agricultural labourer, and the farm managed by a foreman and committee, holding a sufficient number of shares to secure their taking proper interest in the work. This would raise money to stock the farm, which the small farmer is so seldom able to get without borrowing, and would give the labourer a further interest in the land. Some of my tenants have here also shown their willingness to join me in helping their labourers, by offering to take shares to make up the money wanted, and selling them again to the labourers as they find money enough to buy them.

I have described this scheme to you, because I think it will be interesting to you at least to know what has already been done, and which therefore can be presumably done again. At the same time I am quite willing, if you please, to allow that we may be not quite ripe as yet in Granborough, though I trust we are looking up in the world, to start a co-operative farm.

Now just let me glance rapidly at one or two of the ways by which I think it is really practically open to us to improve the condition of the agricultural labourer in this parish.

INCREASED WAGES.

And first (I put it in the first place because the labourer himself likes it to be there), his condition may be improved by the farmer giving him higher wages. Now, of course, the farmer will tell me at once that that course is quite absurd ; he simply can't afford to do that ; to give higher wages to the labourer would mean ruin to the farmer. Well, I am bound to believe

him, or at any rate I am bound to believe that he is honest in his opinion. I am prepared to pay all due deference to his honesty, I am not prepared, however, to pay quite the same deference to his opinion, for I think it is a mistaken one. Let me explain. I believe he could afford to give his men higher wages, and I fancy he will agree with me that he could; but on this one condition, that the men should do higher work. And in order that he may bring about that result, so satisfactory both to himself and the men, I would ask him to consider this—“Why is it that the men, as a rule, work so much harder and better when they are working on their own allotments or by the piece, than they do when they are working on the day system on his farm?” The answer of course is very simple—because it is to their interest to do so. And yet, simple as it is, that is the true way to get good work, and therefore not to grudge good pay. “Make it worth the man’s while to do his best.” And there is another

reason why higher wages will result in better work. It will give the man an opportunity of feeding better, and thereby becoming a stronger man. I have no hesitation in saying, from what I know of the food of the agricultural labourer, that he is miserably underfed, and what is even worse, his children are miserably underfed. Now, raise the man's wages, and he will at least have the opportunity of feeding better, and therefore ultimately of becoming a stronger and better workman. The following remark of Mr. Brassey, the great railway contractor, whose opinion is certainly worth something, is to the point: "An agricultural labourer, with his wages doubled, and thereby supplied with animal food, may be trained into the navvy, when he will do three or four times the work of the mere labourer."

Now, of course, the farmer will very naturally put this question to me, "What security shall I have that by paying my labourers more, I shall get more work out of them?" And it is a

natural question. It may be perfectly true that he cannot get more out of them unless he pays them better; but it is by no means equally obvious that by simply paying them better he will get more work in return. You cannot buy as good a horse for £20 as you can for £50, but you don't make the £20 horse a bit better or more valuable by insisting on giving £50 for it.

PAYMENT BY RESULTS AND INDUSTRIAL
PROFITS.

It seems to me that the only practical way of getting increased work for increased wages is to adopt the principle of payment by results. I believe this principle may be adopted very much more extensively than it has been hitherto. In a pamphlet on the Farm Labourer, lately published by Sir Baldwyn Leighton, this mode of payment has been set out in detail. He has kindly put several copies at my disposal, which I shall be most ready at the close of the lecture to give to any one who may care to have them.

I will quote to you a sentence or two, by which I think you may be able to judge pretty fairly as to the practicability of the plan which he suggests. He puts the words into the mouth of a farmer who is explaining to his labourers a system by which he proposes that they should become sharers in his profits: "Then as to the crops, that is white crops (I don't reckon the others), my land on an average produces twenty-five bushels to the acre. Now for every extra bushel which, by good cultivation, deep ploughing, or extra carefulness and labour, it may be made to give, I shall divide one shilling per bushel among the cropmen. Thus, if on my 100 acres of wheat next year I get twenty-eight bushels instead of twenty-five, that will be 300s., or £15, to divide among those four men; and as I believe with better cultivation and care it may be made to produce nearly thirty bushels to the acre, there would be 500s., or £25, to divide among those four men, or £6 5s. each." Now, of course I do not mean to say that it would be

possible to adopt that plan exactly in every district. Circumstances vary so much, not only in the different districts of England, but in some cases in different farms in the same district, that any one cut-and-dried plan for all would be quite impossible. But, at any rate, I think that scheme may suggest to you plans which certainly might be made feasible if properly adapted by each farmer to the peculiar circumstances of his own case. I would ask the farmers therefore at least to make a point of considering whether some plan might not be discovered by which on each of their farms a system of payment by results might not be successfully adopted without very great difficulty. And on this point to the labourer himself I can give no better advice than that contained in the address of Lord Nelson, which I have already quoted. "Instead of asking for a rise in the daily wage rate, which must always, as I have tried to show you, in the long run depend upon the law of supply and demand, ask your master to give

you every chance of earning what you can at piece-work in winter and summer, and having the chance to do so, work as well and gain as much as you can. It must be better for all, when it can be done, that you should be working with a will for a wage rate which you can increase by extra work, rather than to try to get through the day at the regular daily rate as easily as you can."

CO-OPERATIVE COW-CLUBS.

Then there is another way by which the condition of the labourer may be improved, and one which I am surprised is not more generally adopted in a county which is chiefly pastoral. I mean by the granting of cow-runs. In the north of England this system has been adopted with the happiest results.

One eye-witness says of the men, "Although they get higher wages they work far harder, and are cheaper workmen than those in the south, where I came from twenty years ago. We have

no pauperism or poor people. About two-thirds of the labourers keep cows. I wish I could see the same state of things in the south." On this point perhaps you will allow me to quote a letter which I wrote to the *Daily News* some months back :—

AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATION.—Sir,—In a leading article the other day, upon the Agricultural Labour Question, you say, "Many a labourer feels that without any change in his wages the possession of a bit of land on which to keep a cow would make all the difference to him between wealth and poverty, and in grazing districts the allotment of such bits of land has already solved the agricultural problem." In a paper on "Agricultural Labour" read before the Social Science Congress, last month, at Plymouth, Sir Baldwin Leighton quotes a similar statement, "The concession of cow-land was the solution of the whole question of the agricultural labourer." At first sight this appears to be a very simple solution. Upon further investigation, however, difficulties are naturally found to arise. They differ, of course, very much in different parts of the country. In some districts, even where farmers or landowners would be found sufficiently liberal to grant cow-runs, either as part payment of wages, or at a fair rent, labourers possessed of sufficient capital to purchase the required stock would be

but few in number ; on the other hand, in districts where a considerable number of labourers might be found possessing the required capital, the difficulty of procuring sufficient land there would make itself felt. It is hardly likely, moreover, nor is it to be desired, that landowners, from merely charitable motives, would be willing to let land to tenants whose personal security, in case of failure, would be of a decidedly doubtful kind. Most of the objections, in fact, that may be urged against any general extension of such a scheme, are, ultimately, I think, traceable to this one difficulty, viz., want of capital on the part of the labourers themselves. That difficulty, as it appears to me, can only be removed in one way—by the adoption of the principle of association amongst labourers themselves ; and the adoption of that principle will also, I venture to think, meet all the other difficulties. Some application of the principle of co-operation, if political economists tell us rightly, is sure to be tried in the future, in agriculture, as elsewhere. Why then, I would ask, should not the experiment be made in the direction of associations amongst the labourers, not only for the purposes of strike, or a forced rise in wages, but for purposes of direct production ? Would it not be possible to establish in the agricultural districts, such of them at any rate as are chiefly pastoral, societies organised upon co-operative, or, more strictly speaking, joint-stock principles, by which cow keeping, dairy farming, in fact, on a small scale, might be successfully undertaken by the associated labourers ? Such an

experiment, if carried out with success, would certainly be most valuable, as tending to develop habits of self-reliance and self-government in village communities. It is by experiment only that the final and satisfactory solution of any problem is ultimately reached. And for this reason, if for no other, it appears to me the experiment I have suggested is, at least, worthy of trial.

CO-OPERATIVE STORES.

Then again, I rate very highly indeed amongst the various methods of improving the condition of the agricultural labourer the establishment of co-operative stores. There can be no doubt, I suppose, in the minds of those who know anything of village life, of the immense evils of which the system of credit is the originator. I do not think it is too much to say that, in most of our villages, there is scarcely a single labourer's family that is not, at one time or another during every year, in debt to the village shops; very many families indeed who are never out of debt at all. The evils of this state of things cannot well be exaggerated. The owner of the village shop is generally, too,

person without capital, very little better off, sometimes not at all, than his customers. In the majority of cases he is himself in turn largely in debt to the retail shopkeeper at the nearest market town. As a consequence the village customer has not only to pay very high prices for what he buys, to compensate the shopkeeper for long credit, but he must put up with very inferior goods. Now the very principle of a co-operative store strikes at once at this source of evil. Cash payment is the very first principle of the system of co-operative stores, as it is the great secret of their success. Two such stores have been most successfully established in this neighbourhood, at Swanbourne and Botolph Claydon. The first has now been started some years, and its success is established; the other was inaugurated only in May of the present year. The following statement of the committee of management, I think, will be interesting to you, showing how much may be done in a short time, and with how good and real a result. The

store was opened on the 21st of May, and the committee report the result of its working up to the 30th of September. The cash receipts during that period amounted to £291 17s. 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. The balance of profit, after the discharge of all debts, the payment of wages, and interest at the rate of 5 per cent. on the paid-up capital, amounts to £15 7s. 0 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. Out of the net balance thus obtained the committee were able to pay to all the members a bonus of 1s. 6d. in the pound on the value of their purchases. The cash receipts for the first week of establishment amounted to £8 6s. 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ d., May 25th; highest ditto, £20 14s., Aug. 31st; £17 1s., Nov. 16th.

ALLOTMENTS.

Again, there is the system of granting allotments. I am quite well aware that there is a certain amount of jealousy on the part of tenant farmers of seeing the labourers in possession of allotments. I am certainly of opinion that that jealousy, where it exists, is founded on an error

of judgment. There are many instances which go to prove that it is so. Take one out of many.

M. Hall says, A short time ago "an Oxfordshire squire, struck with the miserable character and low morality of the people in one of the villages which constitutes part of his estate, determined, as a farm of rather more than a hundred acres fell into his hands, to try the experiment of a liberal allotment among his labourers. He divided the farm therefore into plots of three or four acres, and let these plots at the old rent to the agricultural labourers in the village. The plan was followed by the happiest results. The labourers had something to work for, from which they could gather fruit for themselves. Their condition was demonstrably improved, for the rate of wages in this village is 3s. or 4s. a week higher than it is in the neighbouring places, the farmers finding no reason to grumble at the change, and the public-house in the village being shut up for want of custom."

A quite similar instance was told to me only

the other evening by Mr. Henley, one of the Poor-law inspectors. There are two villages not a hundred miles from this place: one of which is noted as being perhaps the most pauperised village in Buckinghamshire, the other contains absolutely no pauperism. This result he considered was brought about entirely by a system of liberal allotments.¹

¹ I am glad to be able to add my own experience to these instances. Soon after the delivery of this lecture, the farmer who had for some years occupied the Glebe Land endeavoured to express his resentment at the enunciation of the sentiments of my lecture by announcing his determination to quit the tenancy. I was thus enabled at the close of 1873 to divide 22 acres of glebe land in half acre allotments among my labouring parishioners at an annual rental of 66s. an acre. The remaining 12 acres of grass land, failing for the time in an attempt to form a co-operative cow club, I let at the same rental to a labourer, in whose integrity and honesty of purpose I had every confidence, and whose industry and thrift, I was glad in this small way to be able to encourage. The success of these allotments has been most remarkable. I only wish I could persuade those country parsons who are complaining so bitterly just now in the pages of the *Guardian* newspaper, of their difficulty in letting their glebe lands, to accept as tenants their labouring parishioners. I feel sure they would find, as I have found, that there would be few acts of their parochial administration upon which they could look back with more sincere and unmixed satisfaction. I

There is just one remark I should like to make here. There are those who, while allowing the advisability of granting allotments, are still strongly of opinion that such allotments should be limited to a small extent, say a quarter of an acre. Now, although I am inclined to think that the men themselves are the best judges of the size of allotment which they are able to work, I must still allow that there is something to be said on the other side. It is a very general opinion on the part of the landowners, founded no doubt on practical experience, that the granting of such allotments as shall release the

ought perhaps, to add this in answer to questions which have been put to me continually during the last four years. "How about the rents? Can you depend upon getting them regularly? Have you had any bad debts?" The rents are due on the first Monday after the 25th of June, and the 25th of December. With scarcely a single exception they have all been paid, not only during the week after they became due, much less, according to farmers' custom during the two months after they became due, but at the very hour on the Monday night which I had appointed to receive them myself at the Vicarage. During the four years I have only had one bad debt, and that not from a labourer, but from a small tradesman in the village.

man from the necessity of selling his labour to others, is a very miserable state of things, resulting on the side of the man in a life which is little better than starvation; and on the side of the landlord in the starving of his land. Now, though again I would say that perhaps the man is the best judge as to whether he likes starving or not; to the other objection commonly brought forward, viz., that the small holder of land is unable to do justice to the land, and will ultimately impoverish it, I would ask the landlord to investigate whether that result is altogether the actual experience of existing facts. One grain of fact is after all worth a bushel of theory. The following is the statement of an eye-witness of the effect produced by a system of small holdings on the estate of Mr. Hope Johnson, in Dumfriesshire (one of the most celebrated of scientific agriculturists). "What we value chiefly in the system is its marked effect in producing and perpetuating an orderly, respectable, and well-

conditioned peasantry. The problem which is generally looked upon as so difficult of solution is here solved with eminent success. It has been shown to be quite practicable to elevate the labouring man, not only without burdening the landlord or farmer, but to the manifest benefit of both ; to foster small holdings without depressing agriculture or retarding improvements ; and to combine permanence with progress." It seems to me further that in comparing the results of what is known as "petite culture," the working of very small holdings, with the ordinary culture of the tenant farmer, it is too often forgotten that the tenant farmer, in very many cases, is not by any means farming his land up to the best of its power. There can be perhaps little doubt of the relative advantages of high scientific farming and the working of small holdings. But in the majority of cases it is not a question of which shall do most justice to the land—the farmer who works with all the newest improvements in machinery, and the

latest knowledge of the science of agriculture, or the peasant proprietor ; but it is a question between the small holder and the tenant farmer, who is tied for want of capital, who may be holding too many acres for the capital he has at command, or whose energy and enterprise is hampered for want of tenant right and better land laws.

MIGRATION AND EMIGRATION.

You will expect that I shall not omit from the list of means by which the condition of the labourer may be improved that of migration and emigration. With regard to emigration I must confess I sympathise greatly with the complaint of the labourer on this point. "There are none too many of us, as it is. There is plenty of work for us to do in England, if things were only as they ought to be." (That is, of course, in the long run, if the land were only worked up to its maximum of production.) 'I assert fearless of contradiction,' said Mr.

Arch, the other day, at Bury St. Edmunds, "that we have not labourers enough in England to cultivate the land as it ought to be." There can of course be no doubt at all that land is by no means in this country worked up to its limit of production. An immense amount is not under cultivation at all—to what extent it is hard to form an accurate estimate. According to Mr. Syme there are "32,000,000 acres of waste land, of which fully one half is capable of cultivation :" say even one third, and that would leave more than 10,000,000 uncultivated acres, or more than three times the extent under wheat at present. It is surely not a matter of surprise that the agricultural labourer, when he becomes aware of this fact, should be in many cases slow to recognise the necessity of carrying to the other side of the globe labour which he knows might be so profitably applied at home. At the same time, since he has no present power of compelling that higher cultivation of land which would of necessity ensure him em-

ployment, it is not likely that when a tempting offer of improving himself even in a foreign land is held out, that he will be long restrained from accepting it. We have certainly had practical enough illustration of that fact during the last month or two. Every week almost we have seen announcement in the papers of the embarkation of large batches of agricultural emigrants bound for the Brazils, for Queensland, for New Zealand. This exodus will tell its own tale, I am afraid, next Spring and Harvest. There are, of course, many places where there is a real overplus of labour. Such, however, are cases of local congestion, best met, not by emigration, which is certainly amongst agricultural labourers an exceptional remedy, but by the natural cure, migration. The difficulty which the agricultural labourer has chiefly felt, of ignorance as to where his labour would be most in demand, and where therefore he would be justified in transferring it, a difficulty in most cases almost insuperable

—the Canon Girdlestanes being but few,—has lately been nobly grappled with by the union. If some general and trustworthy system of registration could be devised, by means of which men might learn where their labour was in demand, there is no doubt that it would be a great advantage not only to them but to the employers of labour also; and certainly much valuable material (and from the nature of the case unfortunately the best of its kind), which is now by means of emigration lost to the country, might be retained.

INCREASED KNOWLEDGE OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY.

After all, however, the means which I rate the highest amongst those which tend to the amelioration of the condition of the farm labourer, because it really would include all the rest, is increased education. And, by education I do not mean the mere increase of book learning (desirable as of course that may be), upon

the part of the agricultural labourer, but the increase of practical intelligence, and knowledge, and skill, upon the part of all concerned with the tillage of the ground—labourer, tenant farmer, and land-owner. For it is certainly not the labourer alone who is in need of education. There can be no doubt to my mind of the immense advantages that might be reaped by both labourer and farmer, if the same amount of intelligence and enterprise was brought to the production of food as is now brought to all our manufacturing industries. There are those indeed who tell us that the tenant farmer, over-weighted with the many troubles, that are increasing and to increase upon him, must very shortly collapse, and give place to the manufacturer of food, who will bring to his business large capital, high scientific skill, and commercial enterprise. It may be some time, perhaps, before that change actually comes about. In the meantime, however, there can be no doubt of the good which would accrue if the tenant

farmer brought a little more intelligent force to the direction of that practical experience, which at present he is too often satisfied to consider sufficient for him, because it was sufficient for his father before him. If it were so, I am sure we should not much longer be suffered to hear that although the principle, for example, of the subsoil drainage of land, has been demonstrated in practice for more than a quarter of a century, yet that of the land requiring drainage, not one half has yet been drained. It has been estimated that the necessary outlay would bring in a return of fifteen per cent. Manufacturing economy would not long delay to avail itself of such a result.

Much has, of course, been done of late years to increase the knowledge of agricultural economy, by the establishment of chambers of agriculture, and in some isolated cases of schools of agriculture. Much, however, remains to be done. I can imagine that the ordinary tenant farmer will be secretly



much in doubt when he is assured that increased economy on his part is what is really most wanted to bring about a satisfactory solution of this question of agricultural labour. But true it is, nevertheless. Using the term economy, for a moment or two, even in its narrowest sense, there can be no doubt of the enormous waste that is suffered to go on by many farmers, not, we may be sure, from intentional carelessness, but from ignorance of facts which ought nowadays certainly to be the common maxims of their trade. To take only a single instance. So general on the part of the ordinary farmer is the almost total waste of the liquid farm-yard manures, as also nearly two-thirds of the effect of the solid manures, from defective application, that it is calculated by good agriculturists that the waste in this one direction alone is equivalent to another rental of the land. Here, then, is an evident opportunity for the exercise of direct economy. But in order that such economy may be exercised,

two things are required: increased knowledge and increased enterprise, the former in most cases, however, implying the latter. It is, in fact, in the long run in agriculture, as it has been in manufacture, to the increase of knowledge, to science, in a word, that we must look for the much needed improvement. The time is not far distant, let us hope, when the tilling of the ground by intelligent forces, guided by intelligent directors of force, shall no longer remain the dream of the few, but shall be realised as a fact by a nation, which is determined to procure the maximum of production from British soil, in strong reliance on its own enterprise and industry, in firm faith of the teachings of that science, which is God's great gift to man. And if, in the moulding of that future of labour, the spirit of co-operation and industrial partnership should prove to be a principal agent, I, for one, shall certainly not be surprised. Indeed if I could dare to hope that, as a result of this lecture, one or two of

you could be led to think how the principle of co-operation could be practically applied to agriculture, I should consider myself amply rewarded. If it should so happen that there may be those present who may be moved to make experiment in that direction, I would commend to them the following words of Mr. Mill. I can conclude my lecture, I am sure, with no more fitting words:—"Co-operation tends to increase the productiveness of labour, in the vast stimulus given to productive energies, by placing the labourers, as a mass, in a relation to their work which would make it their principle and their interest—at present it is neither—to do the utmost instead of the least possible in exchange for their remuneration. It is scarcely possible to rate too highly this material benefit, which yet is as nothing compared with the moral revolution in society that would accompany it; the healing of the standing feud between capital and labour; the transformation of human life, from a conflict of

classes struggling for opposite interests, to a friendly rivalry in the pursuit of a good common to all ; the elevation of the dignity of labour, a new sense of security and independence in the labouring class, and the conversion of each human being's daily occupation into a school of the social sympathies and the practical intelligence."

II.

A STRIKE FOR WAGES.¹

"There be many servants nowadays that break away
every man from his master."—I SAMUEL xxv. 10.

THESE are the words of an angry farmer. Angry because he was asked for wages which he thought were not earned. If you will turn to the chapter in the Bible from which the verse is taken you can read the whole story for yourselves. It is the only account that I know in the Bible of what we should call nowadays a strike for wages.

The circumstances seem to have been briefly these. There lived in a certain part of the country of Judæa a large farmer called Nabal,

¹ Preached during the Eastern Counties Lock-out in 1874.

or rather, perhaps, we ought to call him a large sheep-master. For this man was very much more like the great sheep-farmers of Australia and New Zealand than any of the men we call farmers in Buckinghamshire now. Anyhow he was a very wealthy man, being, as we read, the owner of some 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats. These it was the custom, just as it is in Australia and New Zealand now, to leave to wander for the greater part of the year over the wide common lands, or wilderness as it is called in the Bible, of Carmel. These common lands, however, though they afforded excellent pasturage for the sheep, were by no means very pleasant places for the shepherd. There was, in fact, a good deal of danger of one kind or another. Danger, not only from wild beasts, lions, and wolves, and such like, but danger also from the robbers, who took refuge in that wild place to be out of the reach of the laws of the land which they had broken. *These shepherds, however, of Nabal succeeded*

in gaining the protection of a certain chief or captain of freebooters, who dwelt in these lonely hill pastures, and had made for himself there a certain name and fame. This chief was David, the man who in after years rose to be king of all that country. Just at present, however, he was leading the wild life of an outlaw, surrounded by some 600 men, whose daring excesses he probably in some degree exercised his influence in restraining. At any rate he and his robber band appear to have shown unusual kindness to the shepherds of the farmer Nabal. "They were a wall unto us," as the shepherds told their master afterwards, "both by night and day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep."

For these services of protection David considered he deserved some reward from Nabal. One good turn at least, he thought, deserved another. That his sheep were safe, Nabal might thank his shepherds. That his shepherd swere safe he might certainly thank David.

At the time of the sheep-shearing accordingly, when it was Nabal's custom to make a great feast for all his labourers, David sent ten of his men, with a message to the farmer, telling him what services they had rendered to his servants and flocks, and claiming some reward, "whatever cometh to thy hand for thy servants, and for thy son David." This demand, courteously put, the great sheep-master was by no means disposed to allow. Directly he hears the request he breaks out into a rage, "Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants nowadays who break away every man from his master!"

It was very much as if he said, "And who is David, I should like to know, that he should come here, dictating to me and telling me what I ought to do. I don't want any third parties interfering between me and my labourers. Helping the labourers, you say. Humbug! Helping themselves, you mean. How did the

labourers get on some years back? Talk about wolves prowling about their tents. Stuff and nonsense! The labourers are quite able to keep the wolf from the door, without calling in outsiders to help them. We didn't hear much of the wolves, and the dangers and hardships of living, before this David came putting notions into the men's heads. It is these Davids that are the real wolves; they are the men who do all the mischief. Lazy, idle, good-for-nothing fellows, turned off by their own masters, no doubt, coming here agitating and upsetting the country. If I had my will they should be hung, every one of them, for a pack of meddling mischief-makers." That, or something like it, I take to be the meaning of Nabal's words. Put, however, no doubt, in coarser and more insulting language, for he was evidently a foul-mouthed man—or, as the Bible terms it, "Such a son of Belial that a man cannot speak unto him." One of those cowardly, vulgar souls to be met with

occasionally, who think no word too ill, and no language too foul, for those whom necessity compels to work for them, and whom on that account they are pleased to call their "inferiors."

To David there appeared to be but one course open now. The farmer had refused to listen to proposals fairly and respectfully made, had refused contemptuously, had insulted those who made the demand. There was nothing left now but strife by force. The only question possible between the two men was—which was the strongest? David with his band of needy followers, trusting to union for their strength, and smarting under the sense of wrong ; or Nabal, the overbearing selfish farmer, thinking that his wealth gave him the right to lord it over those who were poor and to grind down those who were needy. Altogether it is an ugly enough story, this struggle between David and Nabal, between the rights of labour, that is to say, and the duties of capital.

How the struggle is brought to a peaceable solution you shall hear next week. In the meantime there are plenty of lessons to be learnt from what we have read already. In the first place, we ought to notice that in this quarrel, as in all such quarrels probably, neither side was quite in the right. It is natural, of course, to sympathise with David. That we all do, I do not doubt, farmers as well as labourers. And that is curious. He was the weakest. And we know him to be the noblest. But then something is to be said for Nabal, too. Not for his bearishness or bad language, of course. But perhaps for this reason. His refusal to pay David's wages arose from a belief that he was being unjustly treated. And that belief was part of his general opinions and views on the rights and duties of property. They were wrong views. At least wrong, held in the way he held them. But then we must remember he had had small chance of finding out that they were wrong views. They were

part of the creed of his class, which he would no more dare to doubt than he would doubt his own existence. It was the creed of his father before him; it was the creed held by all the farmers in the country round. You may conceive, therefore, from your own experience how difficult it would be to believe that what he had been accustomed all his life to consider right was, after all, quite wrong. Again David was wrong too. Almost more wrong, perhaps, in his own way, than Nabal. But then there were excuses for him too. His blood was up. And he made a grievous mistake. But I do not call him a bad man for his mistake. You must take into account his position. He was an outcast and a rebel, it is true. But then we must remember he had been driven into rebellion by injustice. From no fault of his own, but from the mere caprice and jealousy of the ruling despot, he had been obliged to fly from the court and the society of his equals. Unjustly cast out and neglected

by society, we could hardly expect him to show superhuman virtue towards Nabal, who for the moment represented to him society. The whole blame, in fact, we see of this quarrel could not be justly given to either Nabal or David. One cause of the dispute, at least, is to be found in the social circumstances of the time, in the unhealthy state in which the relations of labour and capital happened to be. It was a period of change and adjustment. The patriarchal system was dying out, and giving place to a better social organisation. And as in all such times, social difficulties and conflicts took place. For this quarrel, therefore, society, as we should say nowadays, was responsible. Social prejudices on Nabal's part resulted in a false conception of the rights of labour. Hence the conflict between them.

Now all this story is 3,000 years old. And yet here are we in our country to-day, apparently not a bit nearer the solution of the

problem of labour and capital than they were all those years ago. This lock-out of the agricultural labourers in the Eastern counties is the old story over again. The outward form is slightly altered. But the actual cause of the dispute is very little different. These East country farmers with their 4,000 locked-out labourers are pretty much in the position of Nabal and David. And in this conflict, as in the other, our sympathies naturally go with the weaker, even perhaps more unhesitatingly than in the old story. With David, because he was the noblest, we sympathise of course. But it would have been nobler we think, had he not rushed to his sword quite so hastily. In the present case, however, the positions are somewhat reversed. It is the farmer, who not only refuses the demand, but who is the first to declare war. And that no doubt makes it more difficult to divide our sympathies impartially. At present, however, I think you will do well to

consider rather what are the reasons most prominently in the way of a peaceful settlement, than those which are tending to embitter the dispute. For example, nothing to my mind so much stands in the way of settlement as the false conceptions which both sides have with regard to what justice requires. You hear both sides equally crying out against the injustice of their opponents. The farmer says that it is unjust of the labourers to ask higher wages than he can afford to give. The labourer says that it is unjust of the farmer to offer him lower wages than he can manage to live upon. There is no injustice in either case. The labourer has a perfect right to ask for any sum he likes—30s. a week, if he pleases. And the farmer has a perfect right to refuse to give him more than he likes. It is a mere matter of bargain. And neither farmer nor labourers have the least right to lose their tempers if they can't agree upon a bargain. Both sides are bound to fight out

their differences temperately and with good humour, and to remember that while the oppressor is condemned in Scripture, so also is the thief. This then I would venture to say to you finally. If you, as the labourer, join the Union, which you have a perfect right to do, and which I, for one, think you are perfectly wise to do, you must remember that with the rights of independence you must be prepared also to accept its duties and responsibilities. By joining the Union, which enables you to make a fair commercial bargain with your employer, you must be prepared to find that you have knocked on the head the old system of alms and gratuities—and I hope you will rejoice to discover it. And, on the other hand, you, as a farmer, must also recognise that if you lock out your men, it is the strongest step you can take to abolish that old system of so-called “kindliness,” upon which you have hitherto relied, and to establish the system of commercial bargaining, with no obligation on either side.

And this I believe will be best for both of you. Let us hope, therefore, that the final result of the present debate between labour and capital will be a speedy establishment of friendliness and good-will, based, however, not on gratuities and gifts on one side, and gratitude and servility on the other, but upon a wholesome feeling of mutual self-respect and equal independence.

III.

THE ARBITRATOR.

"Blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast
kept me from avenging myself with mine own hand."
—I SAMUEL xxv. 33.

YOU remember that struggle between David and the rich farmer Nabal, of which I was speaking to you. We had reached that point in the narrative where David, upon hearing of the scornful and insulting answer that the farmer had sent back to his request, had determined to make trial for what he considered his rights by force of arms. "Gird ye on every man his sword," he had said to his followers.

It was an ugly sight, this appeal to force, where the matter, one might have thought,

could have been so easily settled if there had only been a little more courtesy on one side and a little less hastiness on the other.

But the story ends with a scene which we must not omit. The farmer, we read, had a wife, who was as beautiful and wise as he was the reverse. To her, as to the good angel of the house, one of Nabal's servants tells the state of affairs. "Now, therefore, know and consider," he says, "what thou wilt do; for evil is determined against our master." Abigail did not hesitate for a moment. She loads her husband's asses with gifts, and hurries off to David's encampment. She is only just in time. She hasted and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground and fell at his feet, and said, "Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be; and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid."

Defiant and haughty towards the self-asser-

tion of the farmer, David has nothing but deference and respect for the moral influence of a woman. His purpose of wild revenge is turned aside by graceful compliment and frank sympathy. He recants his vow, and thanks God for sending Abigail to meet him. "Blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me from avenging myself with mine own hand." "Go up in peace to thy house; I have hearkened to thy voice."

Now I have no doubt there are those who will say that this was all wrong; conflicts between capital and labour are not to be settled in that way; sound ideas of business and political economy are what are wanted in cases like these, not fine words and compliments. If David was in the right, he should not have given way an inch because some one smoothly told him that submission was a noble thing; and if he was not quite sure he was right, he should just as little have given way, until he was obliged by force of circumstances

to do so, success in matters of business being, after all, the truest test of right.

Now I do not agree with such people. Not because I do not think that sound political economy is not wanted. Just the reverse. In this lock-out in the Eastern counties, for example, it seems to me that that is just what is wanted. But what I do object to is this ; to hear people assert, as so many do, that because commercial principles ought to take the place of the semi-feudal ideas at present existing, and wages be settled by competition and not by favour, that therefore there is absolutely no room at all for a spirit of Christian kindness and conciliation. I am as staunch a believer in the teaching of political economy as any one ; but I am, I hope, a stancher believer in Jesus Christ, and, as such, I hold that Christian principles, so far from standing in the way of an equitable adjustment of wage disputes, on sound economical principles, will rather be found eminently conducive to such an adjustment.

If you will consider again, for a moment or two, this contest between farmers and labourers, which has been going on now for more than a month, I think you will agree with me that there is plenty of room for the application of Christian principles.

I wish the farmers could be got to learn something of a principle which the conduct of Abigail in this story might suggest to them. I am sure they would find it valuable just now. It is this: that class distinction should not be allowed to warp our conceptions of justice.

That principle, if you will read Abigail's words of conciliation to David carefully, you will perceive to have been the secret of her success. Do not forget that in the eyes of the world she was the rich high-born lady, and David but a social outlaw. Yet mark how she addresses him. Her husband, fool and churl as he was, had had nothing but ill-words and insult for David. She is all frankness and courtesy. Nabal had taunted him with his

low origin. "Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse?" Her word was,—"The Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house: because my lord fighteth the battles of the Lord, and evil hath not He found in thee all thy days."

And why was this, but because she had discovered a truth which Nabal had missed, a truth which *we* know to have been a Christian one, that the true worth of a man is not to be estimated by the cut of his coat, or the depth of his purse, "consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesses," but in the life which he leads. Judged by that standard, David and not Nabal was the man of worth, and as such Abigail recognised him, and sympathised with his cause.

Now can it be fairly said that in this Eastern Counties Lock-out the principle of Christian justice has been very prominently visible in the conduct of the employers?

I am really afraid we must say No. A fortnight ago there seemed some hope that

the dispute might have been brought to an end. Mr. Mundella, the Member of Parliament for Sheffield, a man who has proved himself on more than one occasion in trade disputes a true missionary of conciliation between class and class, proposed that the questions at issue between farmers and men should be submitted to arbitration. He put to the contending parties two propositions:—

- (1) Let the farmers agree that the labourers shall immediately resume work, without any conditions as to their being Unionists or Non-unionists.
- (2) Let all questions in dispute as to wages and conditions of working be submitted to a conference of an equal number of farmers and labourers. Should they fail to agree upon any point submitted to them, let them call in some person of weight and authority to act as friendly Arbitrator between them.

These propositions were at once accepted on behalf of the labourers by the secretary

of the N.A.L.U. The farmers, however, rejected the proposal with indignation. And why? Because there was nothing, they said, to arbitrate about. They were not contending for a mere question of wages. It was the right of their men to join the Union which they denied. And there could be no question of arbitration until the labourers renounced that right. With regard to the right of joining the Union, that is a matter of civil law, and before the law in England farmers and labourers are on an equal footing. And with regard to the interference of third parties, suppose the labourers should insist upon such interference. What then?

“Insist!” cries the farmer.

“Yes; why not?”

“But to be in a position to insist a man must be on a footing of equality.”

“Exactly. That is just it. Hitherto the labourer has not been in that position. As an individual he was powerless before capital.

By combination he has gained that position which places him on a level with his master. The bargain which is to settle his rate of wages is no longer to be a one-sided one. In the name of common justice, what is there to complain of in this?"

"But he may use his power to ask for higher wages than I can afford."

"It is too true he may. But is it not also true that your landlord occasionally asks you for a higher rent than you think you can afford. And yet I do not hear of your denying his right to do so if he pleases; at any rate, you do not think that the best answer, in his case, to such a request would be to call him opprobrious names. Nor do you resent, I believe, in his case, the interference of the third party, in the person of his steward, to whom he generally refers you in any difference that may arise about the question of rents. And yet in reality where is the difference between his case and that of the labourers, unless indeed you

do acknowledge that class distinctions affect your conceptions of justice?"

But by this time I fancy I hear some one exclaiming, These surely are not principles to which we ought to listen from a Christian pulpit! Christianity teaches obedience to those in authority, teaches meekness and submission, not insubordination and rebellion. My friends, it is true, Christianity does preach meekness and submission. But did it ever strike you to ask on whom it is that Christianity enjoins these virtues? Do you suppose it means that the poor are to be meek and submissive towards the rich? It is the rich and great and strong whom the Gospel specially requires to be humble and meek. "All of you be subject one to another," says the Gospel; and which needs this witness sounded in his ears most loudly?

It is here, I think, that the influence of the Christian Church might be so beneficially exerted. We have heard a good deal lately

about the duties of the Church, and of the position that she has most generally taken up in this matter. I am one of those, I confess, who think she has been mistaken in her so-called principle of non-intervention.

Do not, however, misunderstand me. In expressing my opinion that the clergy of the Church of England, as a rule, are mistaken in holding aloof from this labour movement, I do not wish to be understood that I consider it to be their duty to interfere between master and man in the settlement of the rate of wages. Far from it. But what I do mean is this. I, for example, as vicar of this parish, have, I consider, not the smallest right to interfere between any of you, whether farmer or labourer, in the settlement of the amount of wage that one of you has agreed to give and the other to take. That is a mere matter of bargain between you, with which I, as your minister, have nothing whatever to do.

But with this I have a great deal to do—that bargains between my parishioners should be honestly made and honestly kept. That is a moral question, not only a commercial one, and I, as a professed teacher of morality, cannot ignore it.

Moreover, if in the arrangement of those wage bargains of yours, either one side or the other were of opinion that joining a class Union would enable you to make a better bargain, I do not see that that fact in itself would be any particular business of mine.

But if I found that this mere fact of joining a Union, of itself a perfectly legal matter, was exalted, by either one side or the other, into a cause of bitter dispute, creating angry feelings and unchristian conflict between two classes of my parishioners, then I consider that I should be altogether failing in my duty as a Christian minister if I kept silence.

"Alas! we, the clergy of the Church of England, have been only too ready to preach

submission to the powers that be, as if that were the only text in Scripture bearing on the relations between the ruler and the ruled. Rarely have we dared to demand, of the powers that be, justice ; of the wealthy man and the titled, duties. Yet for one text in the Bible which requires submission and patience for the poor, you will find a hundred which denounce the vices of the rich. Woe to us in the great day of God if we have been the sycophants of the rich instead of the redressers of the poor man's wrongs ; woe to us if we have been tutoring David into respect to his superior Nabal, and forgotten that David's cause, not Nabal's, is the cause of God."

IV.

POVERTY AND RELIGION.

"Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise
of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."
—**I TIMOTHY iv. 8.**

LET me begin by asking you to consider for a moment or two this question, "Can a poverty-stricken people be a religious people?"

I do not know what answer you would be inclined to give to that question, but my answer would be an emphatic "No!" I am very strongly of opinion that wherever you find a low state of well-being in a country, there you also find a low state of religion. And that is a state of affairs, I think, that we find in England. It is true that we are generally said to be a very wealthy people, and also a very

religious people. That depends a good deal, however, upon what you mean by wealth, and what you mean by religion. If national wealth is to be measured by the amount of money there is in the country, and national religion by the number of churches and chapels, then no doubt England is very religious and very wealthy.

That some people are very wealthy there can be no doubt. I read the other day a list of the names of a number of wealthy Englishmen who had died during the last ten years. In that list there were ten men who had died worth more than £1,000,000; fifty-three who were worth more than £500,000, and 161 who were worth more than £100,000. That would appear to give a startling proof of the wealth existing in this country. But then put this other fact by the side of it, and we shall perhaps be inclined to change our opinion as to national wealth. There were in England last year more than 890,372 persons receiving

poor relief. The population of the country is about 22,000,000. That is to say, then, that taking the country all through, one person out of every twenty you meet in England is a pauper. Now, although you cannot test religion by statistics in quite the same way, yet there are plenty of considerations patent to everybody which lead to doubt as to whether our real religion is to any extent proportionate to our nominal. Let us go back to our question, "Can a poverty-stricken people be a religious people?" You may have thought perhaps that in putting that question I was about to prove to you that because you were poor, therefore you were irreligious; and that would be possible, no doubt. But my object is rather the reverse of that. I want to prove to you that poverty is to a great extent caused by irreligion, that great want of wealth is partly to be accounted for by great want of religion. Don't mistake me, however. I don't want to insult you either by telling you that

you are not religious, or not rich. The blame in either case is not altogether yours.

It might, perhaps, be very much pleasanter for me if I could get rid of this question, which has been tormenting me a good deal lately, by saying, "There is no doubt you are very irreligious people. You don't come to church half as much as you ought. You don't pay half the attention you ought to my sermons. In fact, you are very bad people indeed. And that is the reason you are so poor. Bad people can't expect to be rich. Your poverty is your own fault. If you are ill-off in the world there can be no doubt you have nobody to blame for that but yourselves."

That would be an off-hand way of settling the matter, no doubt. But I confess it does not satisfy me. In fact, it does just the reverse. And for this reason. I have begun to suspect lately that this poverty of yours is partly my fault. I can't help thinking that

we clergy and teachers of religion generally are a good deal to blame, not only for the low state of religion, but also for the low state of well-being amongst the members of our congregations and in our parishes.

For look at it in this way. What is religion? Some people perhaps would say, "It is the art of getting to heaven." And if they are right, then I know I am wrong in what I have just been saying to you about irreligion and poverty. But I don't think they are right. Religion, as I regard it, is the art of living well, not only of dying well. It is the science, if I may use the term, of being and doing good. And the man who teaches that science, the religious teacher or clergyman, as we call him, is one who teaches men how to be and do good.

It is because the clergy and ministers of religion have too often omitted to do that, that it appears to me they are greatly to blame for the bad state of things in which

many of their parishioners find themselves. I am quite well aware that there are a great many sermons preached in England every Sunday telling people that they ought to do good, and to be good, a great many telling them also why they ought to be and do good. But then, as it appears to me, there are not half enough sermons telling people *what* is good, and *how* to be and do it. But then perhaps you say, Everybody knows what is good and right, if they would only do it. But that is just what I doubt, and I will tell you what has made me doubt it more than anything else lately.

It is this labour agitation. If there is one social principle more than another upon which Christianity ought to lay stress, it is surely this. Under God's law no man or class can exist solely for itself. "We are all members one of another. The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee, nor again the head to the foot, I have no need of you.

If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it." The welfare of all is wrapped up with the well-being of each.

It requires no words, surely, to prove that if every one who called himself a Christian really acted up to this principle of their religion, the existing relations between capital and labour, employers and employed, would not be what they are to-day in England.

This principle it is the duty of the religious teacher to press upon every member of his congregation. Why is it, then, we ask, that there is so great a failure in bringing about the required result? I think chiefly, perhaps, for this reason—because the religious teacher has been satisfied too often with merely telling the various classes of which his congregation was formed that their interests were identical, and has not been careful to give them the reasons by which the truth of his statement might be proved.

Those reasons, no doubt, are mainly econo-

mical. It would be necessary, therefore, that the clergyman should know something of political economy as well as theology. And it is that fact which has caused him to hesitate. He is restrained by certain conventional notions as to what the dignity of the pulpit required. Here is the grand mistake. The pulpit, in fact, is dying of dignity.

Religion has to do with everything that affects the conduct of life. And the teacher of religion, if he has any function at all, has surely this—to be the authorised expositor to men of their duties. Those duties, it cannot be denied, press upon every action and instant of life. Wherever men are acting their part in life human responsibility is involved. Conscience is not limited to any one sphere of action. In politics, in commerce, in the market, in the farm, men still remain responsible beings. Consciences are daily shipwrecked in all these regions of thought and life. And wherever conscience goes to work out its

perilous problem, there the pulpit must not hesitate to follow.

"What ought I to do?" is a question never to be trifled with, whatever the emergency may be which occasions it. And who shall say that this labour agitation is not such an emergency?

Labourer, farmer, landlord, are all asking this question, What ought I to do in the present emergency?

How is it to be answered in each case? Good intentions alone will not be sufficient to help them to the right answer. Only specific knowledge will be. And that knowledge, failing other teachers, I say it is the duty of those who claim to be the accredited teachers of morality to inculcate.

Let the clergy, I would say, speak out clearly upon this question of agricultural labour. It is their duty to do so, as it is in all social crises whatever. Let them study the laws of political economy, where they do not already

know them, so that they may make such advice as they may give, not only earnest and well-intentioned, but reasonable and wise. Let them not be such sticklers for pulpit dignity. Our Master did not allow convention to stand in the way of doing good.

Suppose Christ were to come again now to our country, as He did in days gone by to Palestine. Suppose He were suddenly to appear as a teacher in the middle of London, or any of our large towns, as He did of old in the middle of Jerusalem, do you think He would hesitate to speak out boldly on all questions, be they what they might, which He saw were affecting the inmost character of man? I think not. Rather, I am sure, would He be found tearing away the flimsy veil of convention and hypocrisy with which we strive to hide our social evils, denouncing our system of caste as the greatest perhaps of those evils, attacking, as He did of old, our most cherished maxims about the rights of property and the

duties of labour, satirising things grey with the dust of ages, and letting in the light of truth once more to the free souls of men.

There is truth, though not perhaps the whole truth, in the quotation with which I will conclude.

“The modern Christ would be a politician. His aim would be to raise the whole platform of modern society ; He would not try to make the poor contented with a lot in which they cannot be much better than savages or brutes. He would work at the destruction of caste, which is the vice at the root of all our creeds and institutions. He would not content Himself with denouncing sin as merely spiritual evil ; He would go into its economic causes, and destroy the flower by cutting at the roots —poverty and ignorance. He would accept the truths of science, and He would teach that a man saves his soul best by helping his neighbour.”

V.

LIBERTY AND ASSOCIATION.

“Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty : only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.”—GALATIANS V. 13.

THERE was a very curious notice placed on our church door a few weeks ago. Probably very few of you paid much attention to it. It was the announcement by the Steward of the Lord of the Manor of his intention to hold a Court Leet. Some of you, perhaps, have a general notion that that Court has to do with certain old-fashioned customs connected with the buying and selling of land, the closing of foot-paths, and things of that kind, with which you are not greatly concerned. I believe there are very few places in England where this institution still

exists. I suppose it only lingers on in Buckinghamshire because, from one cause or another, we are very tenacious of our old customs.

But although the Court Leet of the Lord of the Manor is now a matter of a very small practical interest to any of us, it has an historical value which is very great. I forget who it was who said "A nation's true bible is its own history." For once, at any rate, I should like to take my text from that bible. It is good, I am sure, sometimes "to look to the rock whence we were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence we were digged," to trace the source of that freedom of which we so often boast as our country's noblest possession, and of

" Those old laws of England, they
Whose reverend heads with age are grey—
Children of a wiser day—
And whose solemn voice must be
Thine own echo, Liberty."

No people, I am sure, can long keep its national self-respect and patriotism which does not take

a proper pride in its own history. We, at any rate, who are lovers of popular freedom and popular progress, need never fear to look back into the earliest days of England's history, for everywhere we shall find, as far at least as our English forefathers are concerned, freedom to be older than bondage, progress to be older than stagnation.

This Leet Court of the Lord of the Manor takes us back to the early days of England's childhood. Some writers have seen in it the germ of all our political life, the very kernel of our representative system. Certainly it is the most ancient court of justice in England. It is the Leeds, or people's court, the assembly of the old village commonwealths, in which each freeman had his vote and place. For the primitive constitution of our old English forefathers was a true democracy, a government, that is to say, of the whole people, and not only of a part; a government in which every freeman had a voice, though not necessarily an equal

voice, in the affairs of the commonwealth. In that old time, more than a thousand years ago, it was the custom of the free-men of each little village community to meet together under the shade of some ancient tree, or on the village green, to regulate the various rights over the common lands, and to pass yearly bye-laws for the common good. Once a year, or oftener, an oath of mutual fidelity, the Peace-pledge, was taken by the members of the community. "For the nourishing of brotherly love"—they swore—"they would be good and true loving brother to the fraternity, helping and counselling with all their power if any brother that hath done his duties well and truly come or fall to poverty, as God them help." "Another peace, the greatest of all there is," ran the law of the last king of the English before the Conquest—"whereby all are maintained in firmer state, to wit, in the establishment of a guarantee, which the English call Frithborgas with the exception of the men of York, who call

it Tenmannetale, that is, the number of ten men. And it consists in this, that in all the villages throughout the kingdom, all men are bound to be in a guarantee by tens, so that if one of the ten men offend, the other nine may hold him to right." "Let all share the same lot," they said ; "if any misdo, let all bear it." Such in those old times, long before the days of policemen and magistrates and Parliaments, was the Government of the people by the people, their system of Frank-pledge, or free engagement of neighbour for neighbour, being in fact the base of all their social and political order.

We cannot bring back those old times, my friends, nor if we could do I think we should greatly wish it. But we shall never do well to forget the old spirit, the spirit of individual freedom, of social charity, of faith in law-abidingness, in which our forefathers met together, prayed together, aided one another, and which they have bequeathed to us their children as their most precious legacy. God

grant that that spirit may never die out among us. Personal independence, mutual responsibility, the rights of liberty, the duties of association, these are the essential qualities of the English character in the earliest time of which history has anything to tell us. They still lie at the root, believe me, of all that is best in our national character. Cherish, I beseech you, labouring brothers, that spirit. Let no man take from you the birthright of your English Freedom. Without freedom, I do not merely say that you cannot be good citizens, I say you cannot be good men. Without liberty there can be no true morality, for there can be no free choice between good and evil ; and liberty means just that. The right to choose what is good. Not, mark you, the right to choose *what one likes* ; but perfect freedom to do *what one ought*. Liberty, remember, is very often most liberty when it is another word for obedience. I call that man truly free who has learnt that hardest of all lessons to learn, *to do the thing he*

doesn't like, from a sense of duty. The greatest slave is not the man who is ruled by a despot, but the man who is the thrall of his own passions. Some people think that it is only necessary to have good institutions to make good men ; but that is far from true. It is not only bad laws, you very well know, which make men bad. It is not only good laws which make men good. History does, indeed, teach us that the good and noble peoples have almost always had good laws and noble governors, while the ignorant and servile people have been ruled by despots and tyrants. But that is much more because good people make good laws, and bad people bad laws, than that good laws make good people, and bad laws bad people. Good men can work good out of an evil organisation, and bad men can work evil out of a good organisation. True liberty in fact is quite as much a moral as a political growth. National character is after all the surest guarantee of national progress, and all that is best in our

English political character is, as I said, the result of free individual action, energy, and independence. We are free, not merely because we live under free institutions, but because each Englishman has to a lesser or greater extent the root of the matter within himself. Like the true Christian, the true Englishman is "a law unto himself." Truly sang Sir Henry Wotton long ago :—

" How happy is he born and taught
Who serveth not another's will,
Whose armour is his honest thought,
And simple truth his only skill !
Whose passions not his masters are,
Whose soul is still prepared for death,
Untied to this vain world by care
Of public fame or private breath !
This man is freed from servile bands
Of hope to rise or fear to fall :
Lord of himself, though not of lands,
And having nothing, yet hath all."

The principle of liberty, however, requires the regulation of the principle of association. Without that correction personal independence, the

sense of the rights due to the individual, has its dangers. Personal liberty is indeed a sacred thing, a birthright which you may not yield up to any ; but after all you must not forget it is only *a means*, not *an end*, in itself. Woe unto you and your future, working men, should the respect you owe to Individual Rights ever blind you to the higher reverence which is due to Social Duty. Do not misunderstand me. I do not ask you to renounce your rights ; God forbid ! The struggle for liberty is sacred, maintain it to the last. But I do ask you to remember that rights can only exist as a consequence of duties fulfilled.

When Christ came and changed the face of the world, foremost amongst the truths he taught was this : "That he who would be first among all, must be the servant of all." He spoke not of rights only, but of duty, of love, of self-sacrifice, of communion. And still, after 1800 years of labour and experience, the lesson of His Communion Supper, that Sacrament of

Brotherhood, is not half spelt out. "We being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."

We have yet to convince men of this. We have yet to convince men that each is bound to live, not for himself only, but for others ; that the well-being of each is to be sought in the well-being of all. Some of you, I know, think that this Labourers' Union of yours is doing much towards teaching you that lesson. I cannot deny it—for I think so, and I thank God for it. I do believe most earnestly, that if you will but use it rightly, this Trade Union of yours may bring home to you many a religious lesson which we ministers of Christ have failed to teach you. For my part I confess I have always felt that there is much in the principle of unionism "which is not far from the kingdom of Heaven." A society in which the fundamental rule is that the members shall not consider each man his own, but every man another's wealth, of which the central spirit is that each shall contribute to

the common welfare, and shall at all costs postpone his own advantage to the common good, cannot fail to do much towards helping you to realise the new law of self-sacrifice enunciated by the Divine Communist of Nazareth.

I am not unaware, of course, nor are you, that the aims of unionism have not always been noble, or its motives pure. “What crimes have been wrought in thy name!” alas, we must say of unionism, as Madame Roland said of liberty. Yet liberty is sacred, and so is association. The history of unionism has had doubtless its evil chapters. I cannot forget, however, that other great causes, not excepting the holiest, have had evil chapters in their history too. There never was a good principle yet probably which did not triumph through much evil.

Be it yours, however, labouring men, to see that your society, of whose history as yet you have no reason to be otherwise than justly proud, shall have no cause to blush for any act or speech of yours. “Let not our liberty be

a cloak for maliciousness." The record of the Labourers' Union cannot but take a prominent place in any future history of popular progress ; be it yours to see that that record shall be one of honour and not of shame. "Ye have been called unto liberty, brethren, only use not your liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." Suffer no one to teach you that your union is a mere collection of individuals whom circumstances have for a time brought together for selfish ends, which, therefore, circumstances may again divide. Learn rather to regard yourselves as a community of freemen and equals, bound together in brotherly concord to labour towards a common aim. Show to the world that your Union is no unworthy successor of those old English brotherhoods whose law ran, "Let all share the same lot ; if any misdo, let all bear it," nay, rather let me say of that Christian brotherhood of which an apostle has written, "The members should have the same care one for another ; and whether one member

suffer, all the members suffer with him ; or one member rejoice all the members rejoice with him."

Cherish then, I beseech you, the spirit of association, the spirit of liberty. Cherish liberty, not that you may be free to do what you like, but free to do what you ought. Cherish association, that you may help yourselves indeed, but not yourselves without others, much less at their expense. So shall you realise not only how noble and glorious a privilege it is to be an English freeman, but something, God grant, of the higher blessing of "those who are called to be Christ's freemen" in that kingdom concerning whose citizens it is written, "If the Son shall make you free ye shall be free indeed."

VI.

EDUCATION.

"In knowledge and wisdom shall be the stability of our times."—ISAIAH.

WE have been hearing a good deal in our village lately about the working of the new Education Act. Some of you, I know, thought the other day, when the School Attendance Officer went round to your cottages that you did not like that Act at all. One or two of you, I am sorry to say, were barely civil to him, and told him that you had no intention of obeying it. I don't think you quite meant what you said. But will you let me say one or two words to you about it, and if I may, I will take as a sort of second text, the first clause of the

Act itself. The words are these: "It is expedient to make further provision for the education of children, and for securing the fulfilment of parental authority in relation thereto."

Here we have two principles stated. First, that it is the duty of the State to make provision for the education of its citizens. Second, that it is the duty of every parent to see that his children are properly educated. I shall divide what I have to say under these two heads—the duty of the State, and the duty of the parent. I am afraid there are still some people who are not at all satisfied about this first principle, who are not ready to accept the truth of that sentiment of Isaiah, "that in knowledge and wisdom is the stability of our times." There are people who say, "No, Education, at least too much of it, for labouring people, is a bad thing. It gives people notions above their place. It teaches them their power, and makes it difficult to keep things quiet and

orderly. So far from being the 'stability of our times' it is a great cause of social unsettlement." I have even been assured by foolish and ignorant persons that since the country has been somewhat better educated there has been a great increase of crime.

Now that is all wrong. Of course it is very easy to point to the newspapers and the police reports in proof of such an idea. There is undoubtedly a great deal of crime in the country. But if you want to find out whether crime is increasing in proportion to the population, you must not trust merely to your memory of police reports and startling instances of crime which you have read in the newspaper. There are proper places to go to for facts of that kind. Mr. John Bright, not long ago, speaking to a large number of working men at Rochdale, recommended all his hearers to procure for themselves the *Financial Reform Almanac*. Now, if you were to take his advice and buy that book, which you can do for a shilling, you

will find in it a great deal of interesting information, and amongst other things the statistics of crime in this country. And you will find this, that so far from crime being on the increase it is exactly the reverse; that in fact the inmates of our borough and county gaols are steadily on the decrease, so much so that it was publicly stated by Mr. Pell in the House of Commons last year, that there are no less than sixty prisons in England that might be closed.

But then some people say, "Crime generally perhaps may be diminishing, but the proportion of educated criminals is increasing." And if that was true it would be to some extent possibly an argument against education. But then it is not true. In our prison statistics we have the following account of the educational condition of the prisoners:—

That 97 out of every 100 could neither read nor write.

That a fraction under 3 in every 100 could read and write well.

That only 1 in 600 had superior education. For those, however, whose minds are more impressed by sensational facts than argument, take this instance on the other side which came across my notice the other day. A dreadful murder was committed last year in a village called Malling, in Kent. In that village there have been no less than six dreadful murders within the last twenty years! Now mark this. Up to the time of the passing of the Education Act of 1870 there was no school in the neighbourhood, the result being that in the last trial none of the various witnesses examined could write their names, except the policeman and the publican. I leave you to draw your own conclusion.

Seven years ago the Government of this country took up the question of Education, and passed the Act of 1870. As early as 1736, Prussia had declared the elementary education of the people to be an essential part of state policy, and in 1810 passed a law, which, in most

of its provisions, anticipated by sixty years Mr. Forster's Act. During the last few years great efforts have been made and much has been done to overtake these arrears of educational work. Last year, however, it was felt that a further step in advance must be made. The provisions of the new Act I have already explained to you elsewhere. A very excellent summary of its main provisions was given in the *Labourers' Chronicle* a few weeks back.

One most important provision of that Act is the power which it gives to enforce the regular attendance of children at school. I do not wish, however, to dwell upon that side of the matter in this place; I prefer rather to press upon you the deep responsibility which every parent incurs in withholding education from his child. I would wish rather to help you to realise the Christian duty of Parenthood.

I know scarcely any subject more solemn than this. There is a text in the Bible—a very terrible text—yet our Master's own word, which

I wish I could brand upon the conscience of every father and mother here. It occurs three times in the Gospels. It is this, "It were better that a millstone were hanged about a man's neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones."

Perhaps you do not quite see the awful significance of those words—how they bear upon you. Perhaps you say, "No, those words do not touch me; I do not offend any of my little ones; I do not willingly teach them evil." God grant that it may be so. But remember what the poet says:—

"More evil is wrought
By want of thought
Than even by want of heart."

You may offend the little ones not only by doing to them what you ought not to do, but also by leaving undone what you might do. Are you guiltless in that matter? Have you really done all that you can for your children?

You would, I know, think it a disgraceful thing if you suffered your children to starve when you had the means to nourish them. You would rightly cry shame on any one who neglected to give food to his children. You would sacrifice everything yourself rather than that they should starve. But what of the children's minds. What right have you to starve them? Do you say, "That is all very well; but we know we can't live without food, and we can live without education. We parents have got on very well without it, and our children must do the same." I was marrying two people not very long ago, and when it came to signing their names in the register I found as, alas, I too often do find, that neither of them could write. I said to the man, "You ought to come to the night school to learn to read and write, and then you could teach your wife. His answer was this, "I've got to work. What's the good of education to me?"

I am glad to think, however, that a great

many of you who have to work are beginning to find that education is a very great good indeed. You are beginning to find that the difference between an educated and an uneducated workman is as the difference between comfort and misery. An educated workman, a man whose faculties are trained, has ever so much better chance of getting on. The uneducated workman gets left behind in the race, and rightly so. An employer of labour was complaining to me the other day of the stupidity of one of our village lads. He had had occasion, he said, to stop his waggon half-way down the hill, and he told the boy to scotch the wheel. The lad put a half brick "at the back of the wheel." Now uneducated workmen, it appears to me, are always doing things of that kind. They are continually scotching the wheel at the wrong side. Their work may be all very well up to a certain point, but sooner or later the want of brain-teaching is sure to make itself felt, in some piece of stupidity which may very

likely spoil in a moment the results of a whole week's drudgery.

But it is not only in matter of work that education is of use. It is of use in play. People are complaining a great deal, as you know, nowadays, about the fearful evil of drunkenness, and are trying all kinds of methods to stop it. But after all, education remains as one of the most effective of its antagonists. And for this reason. Education opens out to a man infinitely better ways of getting recreation, and even excitement, than through the agency of strong drink. The educated man can get his drunkenness, so to speak, out of books. I don't say, of course, that education will do away with drunkenness, or that no educated man ever gets drunk. But I do say that education supplies an additional means of escape from low and degrading tastes. The agricultural labourer on a winter's evening, who can't read, what is he to do? His only choice lies between the public-house and bed!

I tell you, my friends, and I speak most seriously, if I, knowing the value of education as I do, had the choice given me, between life, without education—life, such as, God help them, many a man lives in England with his mind closed to everything but eating and drinking, and drudging—and death: I tell you plainly, I should choose death. Oh, it is sad to see! I know no sight more sad than a human being, gifted by God with reason and intellect, sunk, for want of due training, into the condition of a mere brute—

“The moving glory of the heavens, their pomp and pageantry,
Flame in his shadowed face, but no soul comes up to
see;
He sees no angels lean to him, he feels no spirit
hand;
Melodious beauty sings to him, he cannot under-
stand.”

Fathers and mothers, you who have children, and who do not do your duty by them, do

frown, from steadfast adherence to the right. A man of that class to whom Abraham, and Moses, and David had belonged, a keeper of sheep on the wild uplands of Judah, a plain labouring man, familiar, as all his words imply, with the common sights and sounds of country life, sharing in all the hard life, the wrongs and sufferings of the country poor, "the Lord had taken him as he followed the flock, and had said unto him, Go prophesy unto my people Israel." A true child of nature, schooled in that wisdom which a poet of our own has taught us, may come to the plainest labouring man from the common incidents of his daily life—

" Fields, where with cheerful spirits he had breathed
The common air : the hills which he so oft
Had climbed with vigorous steps, which had impressed
So many incidents upon his mind,
Of hardship, skill, or courage, joy or fear."

Originally no prophet, neither a prophet's son, he had yet succeeded in catching the popular ear by the boldness with which he had de-

nounced the vices of his time. On the hill-side of Samaria he had taken up his burden against the oppressors of the poor. In broad shepherd language he had addressed the nobles of his people as “those who put away the evil day . . . They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and abhor him that speaketh rightly. Forasmuch, therefore, as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat ; ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them ; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine in them. I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins—they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right.”

With his soul full of disgust and horror at the licentiousness and drunkenness of the nobles, their luxury and insolence, at the bribery practised in the judgment seats, at the narrowness, the fanaticism, the hypocrisy of the priesthood, the robbery, the folly, and the oppression on all

sides, no wonder the rustic prophet was tempted to cry, "The prudent shall keep silence in that time, for it is an evil time." But it was a temptation to which for himself, at any rate, he did not yield. In the very sanctuary of Bethel itself, in the sacred and royal precincts, the fearless shepherd utters the impending doom of the nation.

The high priest cannot endure the rebuke. He drives away the prophet as an intruder and heretic. "Prophesy not again any more," he cries, "at Bethel, for it is the king's court, it is the king's chapel." The experience of the shepherd prophet is no exceptional one in history. Popular reformers in all ages and all countries, from Amos down to Joseph Arch, have rarely met with much favour from the established authorities in either Church or State.

Dean Milman once spoke of the Hebrew prophets as "the constitutional patriots of the Jewish state." Patriots undoubtedly they were,

but patriots very often who, in virtue of their patriotism, were directly in opposition to the more regularly constituted authorities. They were, in fact, the champions of popular liberty and popular justice at a time when those virtues met with little regard from either priests or kings. They furnished—as Mr. Mill has truly shown—that antagonistic element in the national life which is, after all, the truest guarantee of progress. With the Jews, it is true that progress was in the main religious and social, not political. But compare the history of the Jews with that of any other Eastern nation, and bearing this hint in mind, you will see why it was that possessing in common with other Orientals an absolute monarchy and an organised priesthood, that great nation never became stationary and stagnant, but was continually progressive. The prophets, indeed, far more than the priesthood, were the true religious leaders of the people. They, rather than the priests, were always the first to hit the blots

of the present, and to grasp the new truths of the future. I think you will understand me when I say that they were in many respects the equivalent of the modern so-called "Agitator." They represented, that is to say, for the Jewish nation, that element of free and open discussion without which it is possible indeed to have order and industry, but not possible to have either improvement or progress.

Now, here we have a principle which I wish I could impress upon those who are always so ready to denounce all popular agitation as mischievous and evil.

Take this labour agitation, for example, of the last few years. One would imagine, to hear some people talk, that an Agitator was of necessity an incendiary, or a rogue. That a man should have deliberately set himself to question in any way the absolute beneficence of the existing relations between capital and labour, much more to make men dissatisfied

with such relations, to have taught labouring people to think, to speak, to act for themselves, to regard sharply their own interests, not merely to accept placidly whatever according to the old customs those interests by others were considered to be, in a word,—not to be content with that state of life in which they found themselves, especially if it appeared likely that it was a state of life into which man and not God had called them, were grounds quite sufficient for any such belief.

Few rural crimes, in fact, would appear to be more heinous than that of open criticism of the old customs; and this, quite apart from the question as to whether the customs criticised are good or bad. It is the criticism itself that constitutes the crime.

“ Old things need not be therefore true
O brother men, nor yet the new ;
Ah, still a while the old thought detain,
And yet *consider it again.*”

But that is unfortunately exactly what the employer of rural labour will not as a rule consent to do, much less, if he could avoid it, consent that his labourers should learn to do. And it is because that word, "consider it again," is, so to speak, always the Agitator's last word, which makes him so objectionable.

The fact is, it is very difficult for the farmer to get rid of the idea that the labourer in combining to raise wages is committing an act of insubordination, for which he ought to be punished like a soldier under the Mutiny Act. The old idea that custom and not competition regulates wages, it is true, is almost exploded ; but the true action of the law of supply and demand is not as yet quite clearly apprehended. That convenient phrase of the political economists the farmer has not been slow to learn ; but he has put his own interpretation upon it. Wages, he says, are regulated by the law of supply and demand, but that is a law, he thinks, *of which the buyer of labour and not the seller*

is the sole administrator. He recognises that the price of labour is a question of bargain, but he does not quite so clearly see that the bargain must be made in open market, and, to be fair and just, must allow of perfect freedom of choice on both sides.

To the labourer, until the advent of the Union, that freedom of choice was practically denied. It was the Union in fact which first gave free play to the action of the law of supply and demand, and which, by providing, by means of migration and emigration, an outlet for the surplus labourers of an overstocked market, put the seller of labour in some degree on a fair level with the buyer.

I am not at all sure whether even now the farmers are quite ready to acknowledge how legitimate is this action of the Union, and how reasonable for such a purpose is agitation.

It is a grievance, they say, that agitation should have been fostered by outsiders. It is the "*paid* agitator" who is disliked so bitterly

And yet, once grant the cause for which agitation is promoted to be just, where is the stigma in being an agitator? If the cause is bad, so also is the agitator; but if it is good, the office of agitator is good also. And as to the fact that he is paid for his work, there is surely no necessary antagonism between a salary and sincerity. "The labourer is worthy of his hire," whether his labour be the ploughing of a field, the digging of a drain, the shoeing of a horse, or the organising of a society, the stirring up of enthusiasm, or the making of speeches. Again, it is said, "It is the duty of the labourers' delegate to foster class strife." If that were true, it is not likely that I, as vicar of the parish, would be found ready to give the agitation my sympathy. But in the first place, I deny emphatically that it is the office of the agitator to foster class strife. I am equally ready, however, to acknowledge that that has too often been the unfortunate result of his action. I hope you do not think that the two assertions are inconsistent.

There is a saying of our Lord's containing a somewhat similar apparent contradiction in terms, of which, as it bears in principle directly on this question, I will venture to remind you. The words are these—you will find them in Matt. x. 34, and Luke xii. 49—"Suppose ye that I am come to send peace on earth? I tell you nay; but rather division. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword."

Now I do not think that many of you have been much perplexed or distressed by the apparent contradiction between these words of Christ and the expressed object of his coming. You have said very truly—"We must distinguish here between the *object* of Christ's coming and the *effect* of Christ's coming. Jesus Christ was indeed the Prince of Peace, who came 'to guide *our* feet into the way of peace.' We acknowledge love, brotherhood, goodwill amongst men, to have been the master-note of his Gospel. We cannot, however, conceal

from ourselves that one result of that message has often been disunited households, broken friendship, religious hatred, discord, disunion, division of all kinds. Yet here we know the sword was the sign of Peace. If the message of Christ divided men, it was at least a sign that some men were in earnest about it. If it brought division into a house, it also brought energy and activity, it put an end to the fatal lethargy, to the numbing stupor of indifference which was eating out the life of men's souls. The division must needs have come, but it came not *of* the Gospel, but *through* the Gospel. We must distinguish between the intention and the consequence, between the object and the result."

Now it is exactly this principle which I would wish you to bear in mind when you are speaking of the class strifes which have been the occasional results of labour agitation.

God forbid that I should for a moment seem to speak, from this place especially, of

class strife as a slight thing, or to regard it as other than a most lamentable evil. In this venerable House of God, at any rate, sacred to all of you I doubt not, to poor as well as rich, to labourer as well as farmer, by many hallowed memories and cherished associations, I should indeed fail in my duty if I suffered myself to forget that I am Christ's ambassador, not to one class or another of my parishioners, but to all classes equally. To endeavour to knit men together "in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body" of God's Son, must ever, I hold, be the highest privilege of a Christian minister. I trust I may never forget it.

But you would not, I am sure, think I was rightly fulfilling the duties of my office as the authorised teacher of morality in this parish if in any moral difficulty or social emergency my first question should always be—"Is the discussion of this matter likely to unsettle the parish? What will be the result of out-spoken opinion as to the right or wrong of this question?

Shall I run the risk of offending some of my leading parishioners? Will it make it very difficult to live peaceably with any of them? Will my advocacy of what appears to me to be right and reasonable lead to class division and social heart-burning?" These are not surely the first questions you would desire to see a clergyman putting to himself in any circumstances of moral difficulty. Rather, I trust, you would desire him to ask first of all, "What are the conditions which in this parish make right conduct, the 'good and holy living,' of my parishioners most difficult? Are there any purely material obstacles in the way of 'pure religion breathing household laws'? What, for example, are the physical conditions under which the distinctively home virtues find their nourishment—parental love, filial obedience, household thrift, cleanliness, modesty, chastity, self-respect, purity and simplicity of heart? Is the meagre growth of these virtues due entirely to failure of individual will, or can it be

said that the circumstances of the labourer's life and sleep are so degrading that there is no moral room for their growth? What provision is there for the three essentials of physical life—pure air, pure water, pure food? What for the three essentials of spiritual life—'admiration hope, love'? What groundwork is there upon which to build the social virtues—generosity, justice, mercy? What soil in the day-labourer's life for those root-virtues of a manly character—self-reliance, self-help, independence, ambition? Does a life of steady industry lead to any other result than that of an old age of penury and want?"

I think if a clergyman will honestly ask himself such questions as these, he will not long hesitate on which side his sympathies ought to lie, or his duty to call him. He will not, I think, much longer care to preach that the moral conditions of life should be conformed to the economical rather than that the economical should be conformed to the moral.

For myself, at any rate, I desire to say with St. Jerome of old, "If an offence come out of truth, better is it that the offence come than that the truth be concealed."

One word, and I will conclude. Do not suppose that because I am ready to defend sympathy with social agitation, that I am at all blind to the dangers to which, when guided by evil hands, it may lead. But I think that even the most timid observer of the signs of the times cannot but allow that few things have been more remarkable about the conduct of the farm-labourers' agitation than the anxious moderation and sober judgment of its promoters.

It is evident that the peasantry of England have advanced many a long step from the days of Luddism and Jack Straw. No generous mind, I am sure, can listen to the sturdy common-sense, the manly independence, the graphic eloquence of Joseph Arch, without feeling a new pride in the country whose lowest ranks can produce such a man.

If words of caution are needed, I know of none more forcible than those which you may read in the first address issued by the President of the Labourers' Union, and whose echo has seldom been absent from any succeeding speech of his: "Let peace and moderation," he said, "mark all our meetings. Let courtesy, fairness, and firmness, characterise all our demands. Brothers, be united, and you will be strong ; be temperate, and you will be respected."

VIII.

THE LANDLORD.

"Let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley."—JOB xxxi. 40.

THIS is a good landlord's idea of bad farming. Of the patriarch Job, as a pattern of patience, you have all, I doubt not, often heard. I take him, however, this morning as the type of a model landlord.

Critics tell us that it is very difficult to determine exactly during what age of the world the patriarch Job lived. But there appears to be little doubt that it was somewhere between the times of Abraham and Moses. The quaint simplicity of manners, the archaic language, the free, vigorous life of the desert, everything in fact which we call local colouring, point to the

patriarchal rather than any later age, as the period to which the story of the book of Job belongs. There is an undoubted social advance, it is true, upon the time of Abraham, but nothing which may not be accounted for by the progress of events in the intervening period.

The patriarch is described as living in considerable splendour and dignity, surrounded by a large number of servants and retainers. In the early part of the speech which ends with the words I have taken as my text he is spoken of as being received with the highest honour and respect when he came to take his seat in the Town Gate to dispense justice and judgment. Altogether it is plain that he is a man of very high rank and immense wealth; a warrior and chieftain, successful in war, prosperous in peace; an upright man also, blameless in all the relations of life, declared by God himself to be “without his like in all the earth; a perfect man, —one who feareth Gód and escheweth evil.”

If it were not for the Eastern name and the

Eastern colouring, there is not a little in the outward circumstances of the patriarch which, notwithstanding the long interval of probably forty hundred years or more, would remind us of some feudal chieftain of our own land a few centuries ago.

Indeed, if you will read carefully with me the most important parts of Job's concluding speech, you cannot, I think, fail to see how natural is that interchange of the words "patriarchal" and "feudal," which I dare say you may have often noticed in the speeches of those who have been talking to you about the relations of the modern English landlord with those who till the soil.

At any rate, there are lessons of duty and responsibility I think to be learnt from the words of the patriarch Job, uttered nineteen centuries before Christ, even by our modern Squires living in the nineteenth century after Christ. Let me read from the eleventh verse of the twenty-ninth chapter:

"When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.

"I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame.

"I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out.

"If I did despise the cause of my man-servant or of my maid-servant, when they contended with me: what then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? Did not he that made me in the womb, make him? and did not one fashion us?

"If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because my hand had gotten much; this also was an iniquity to be punished. . . .

"Did I fear a great multitude, or did the contempt of families terrify me, that I kept silence? . . .

"If my land cry against me, or that the furrows thereof complain; if I have eaten the fruits thereof without money, or have caused the owners to lose their life: let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley!"

Now this in many respects I think you will agree with me is a very remarkable summary of the duties of a good landlord. It is notable especially, I think, for its assertion of two important principles, which, put into modern form, may fairly stand thus:—

(1) That the cause of the poor should be treated not merely with mercy, but with justice.

(2) That production of food for the people is the primary trust upon the land.

Let me say a word or two upon each of these two principles, for it is mainly, I think, in his neglect of these that the modern English landlord fails in his conception of social duty.

I.—It would be possible, I am aware, to draw a picture of a vicious, selfish landlord, living in absolute idleness and luxury, callous to every social obligation which his property imposes. That there are such men, I fear, cannot be denied. I cannot forget that it was no “blatant demagogue” or noisy agitator, but a true-hearted philanthropist and tender parish priest, who wrote,

“ You have sold the labouring man, Squire,
Body and soul to shame,
To pay for your seat in the House, Squire,
And to pay for the feed of your game.

“ When packed in one reeking chamber,
Man, maid, mother and little ones lay;
While the rain pattered in on the rotting bride bed,
And the walls let in the day;

“ We quarrelled like brutes—and who wonders ?
What self-respect could we keep ?
Worse housed than your hacks and your pointers,
Worse fed than your hogs and your sheep.”

But the “bad squires,” I am willing to allow, are the exceptions and not the rule. It is not so much, as it appears to me, in wilful viciousness

certainly no longer children over whom paternal rights can with safety be asserted. More and more every day is it becoming evident, that if advice or sympathy or assistance is to be offered to them it must come, not as from the patron, but as from the friend. It will be some little time yet, no doubt, before the squire can altogether feel that he is valued not for his gifts, but for his sympathy—not for what he can do, but for what he is. Yet nothing short of this, I venture to say, ought to be the ideal with which a good landlord is satisfied.

There are those, I am aware, among our landed proprietors, who repudiate altogether the industrial ideal. Strangers by their whole life and tradition to the habits of industrial activity, it is perhaps excusable that the substitution of economic for semi-feudal conditions should be regarded by them with a certain degree of suspicion. The commercial system, it is said, is devoid of human sympathies. The principle of "kindliness," always so pleasing an

element in the relation between farmer and man, must, they complain, entirely disappear before the régime of "cash payment" and hard bargains. Commercial contract will kill Christian charity.

To that I answer—first, the breaking up of the old feudal relations is inevitable. It would be useless, it would be impossible, to re-invigorate them.

"The old order changes, giving place to the new ;
And God fulfills Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

The old feudal order is giving place to the new economic one. The very basis and groundwork of this labour struggle of the last few years is that the epoch of charity in the rural districts is closed, and the industrial age has begun. It is useless, I say, to resist this change. The sensible course, as it appears to me, for a just landlord, is to accept that change as inevitable, and to use such moderating influence

as he may possess to make the transition from the old to the new conditions as easy and gentle as possible.

And secondly, I would protest most strongly against the assumption that there is anything in strictly economic principles which need in any sense stand in the way of the exhibition of the most generous and sympathetic feelings between master and man. If there is any one who disputes that statement, I would ask him to read carefully such a book as the *Life and Letters of Thomas Brassey*, the great Railway Contractor, and then say whether he considers that the strictest economic conditions, leading to complete industrial success, are in any degree inconsistent with the kindest relations between master and man—the most absolute trustfulness and generosity on the part of the employer met by the most chivalrous devotion on the part of the employed.

II.—We must pass, however, to our second

principle ; that production of food for the people is the peculiar burden upon the land.

It was Mr. Mill, I think, who once said, that one of the most "peculiar burdens" upon the land in England was the landlord. In all probability that remark may seem to some of you a somewhat strange one. We are so accustomed to think of the landlord, the farmer, and the labourer, as the three indispensable requisites in connection with the cultivation of land, that the very idea of a state of affairs in which these three should not exist is almost inconceivable. And yet the way in which land is held and cultivated in England, at the present time, is no indication at all of the way in which it was held in days gone by, or of the way in which it is held now in other countries of Europe, or in the United States or even in our English colonies, Canada or Queensland. Land tenure is in fact a mere matter of custom, varying in different countries and different times.

It is not the landlord, the farmer, and the

labourer, who are the three indispensable requisites of production; but land, labour, and capital. And these three things, it is evident, may be brought together in a variety of ways. They may be all furnished by one person, or they may be furnished by many persons. In our English system of land tenure the three requisites of production are distributed unequally between the three classes—of proprietor, farmer, and labourer; the proprietor furnishing land and capital; the farmer, capital and superintending labour; the labourer, labour only. In this arrangement we have many advantages, but we have many disadvantages also. Few things in fact are more in need of revision and reform than the English land laws. It is very natural that this should be so. For the laws which regulate the tenure of English land have come down to us from a time when the land-holding class were the sole governing class in the country, contriving therefore, perhaps, naturally enough, that the laws which

regulated the tenure of their lands should contribute to the permanence and power of their own class rather than to the general welfare of the people.

It is very customary to hear our land laws denounced as feudal in character. This is hardly just. The evils which are characteristic of our present system are really much more that outcome of legislation dating from Tudor times, than of feudal principles. The feudal system had, at least, this for its main principle; that tenure of property is dependent on the due fulfilment of social obligation. Under that system the landlords of England were not, strictly speaking, landowners at all, but land-holders, tenants in fee, holding the soil from the State, under conditions of military service. The land was held in trust for the nation under that obligation, and burdened with the support of soldiery for the national defence. It was to the jealousy of the Tudor kings for the great nobles, and their fear of the material power which the

maintenance of independent soldiery gave, that the land was relieved from this obligation and the burden of military expenditure thrown on the industrial classes by means of a general excise.

The evil effect of this policy, not only upon the system of land-holding, but upon the general social condition of England, can hardly be exaggerated. The new idea of land-owning rather than land-holding, of the abstract right, that is to say, of private property in land, soon became fertile of mischief. At the close of the fifteenth century the owner of land, discovering that it would be more profitable to himself to feed sheep than men, proceeded to convert wholesale arable land into pasture. Villages were destroyed, tenants were turned adrift from their holdings, peasants from their homes, to make room for sheep. This deplorable policy of the Tudor landlords, however, brought its own punishment in a terrible increase of popular distress and crime. The necessary supplement

soon followed in the permanent establishment of taxation for the support of the poor. English pauperism and the English Poor Law are, in fact, the legacy of Tudor landlords to the English people.

To this same principle also of private property in land may be traced the appropriation to the sole use of the landlord class of vast quantities of common land, over which the public possessed invaluable rights. Those rights have been gradually absorbed, in the majority of cases by means of private Acts of Parliament; in not a few cases, however, by direct usurpation. The enclosing of common land began in the reign of Queen Anne, and has continued down to the present time. Between the passing of the first Enclosure Act in 1709 and 1845, when the system of enclosing by private Bills nominally ceased, it has been calculated that more than seven million acres of land were enclosed. It is true that some pretence of compensation to the people for

their rights of common was occasionally made. In some cases the poor man received a small bit of land in lieu of his right to graze cow or goose on the common. But the bit of land was soon sold, the money spent, and his children, at any rate, none the better for the concession. They would have been distinctly the better for the cow and the goose. In many cases, however, the poor man got no compensation at all. "This I know," said the late Duke of Newcastle once in an Enclosure debate in the House of Commons,—"this I know, that in nineteen cases out of twenty, Committees of this House sitting on Private Enclosure Bills neglected the rights of the poor."

It is urged, of course, that the enclosure of common land was necessitated by the interest which the general community has in the productive powers of the soil being put to the most effective use. It cannot be denied that without enclosed fields improved management of the land would have been impossible. It is

true, of course, that a great improvement of agriculture has been the result of the system of enclosure. But it is not equally true that no measure could have been devised other than one which resulted in the direct enrichment of one class and the direct impoverishment of another. The plan adopted was to give the newly-enclosed land to the few rich, with some miserable pretence of compensation to the many poor. It would have been possible, I venture to think, and in all probability quite as much for the happiness and prosperity of the nation at large, if the land had been given to the many poor, with just compensation for the existing rights of the few rich. Certainly few things are more sad in the pages of our popular history than the story of the divorce of the English peasantry from the soil. Mr. Cliffe Leslie, in his very excellent book on the English land system, in telling that story once again, says very truly, "Once, from the meanest peasant to the greatest noble, all

had land, and he who had least might hope for more. Now, there is being taken away from him even that which he has. Once there was an ascending movement from the lowest grade towards the highest ; now there is a descending movement in every grade below the highest. Every grade of the rural population has sunk ; the landed yeomanry have almost gone ; the tenant-farmers have lost their ancient independence and interest in the soil ; the labourers have lost their separate cottages and plots of ground, and their share of a common fund of land ; and whereas all these grades were once rising, the prospect of the landed yeomanry is now one of total extinction ; that of the tenant-farmers increasing insecurity ; that of the agricultural labourer, to find the distance between his own grade and that of the one above him wider and more impassable than ever, while the condition of his own grade is scarcely above that of the brutes."

It would not be difficult, I think, to trace to

this same Tudor principle of the abstract right of private property in land, most of the other evils which are characteristic of our present system of agricultural economy. But I must conclude. I have endeavoured to lay stress upon the two principles which appear to me ought to be most prominent in an English landlord's conception of social duty. There is little doubt that at no very distant date the English land laws must undergo revision. The method of that revision cannot but depend in a large measure upon the manner in which the land-owning class have put into practice those two principles. For the rest, I do not know that that "Prayer for Landlords" which is to be found in the last Primer of Edward VI. has become even now too archaic for modern use :—

"The earth is Thine, and all that therein is, notwithstanding Thou hast given the possession thereof to the children of men. We heartily pray Thee to send Thy Holy Spirit into the hearts of them that possess the grounds and

pastures of the earth ; that they, remembering themselves to be Thy tenants, may not rack and stretch out the rents of their houses and lands, nor yet take unreasonable fines and incomes, after the manner of covetous worldlings ; but so let them out, that the inhabitants thereof may be able to pay the rents, and to live and nourish their families, and to relieve the poor."

IX.

THE LABOUR QUESTION IN 1877.

[A RURIDECANAL ADDRESS.]

“In the rural controversy between capital and labour, even apart from one past and unforgotten offence in a higher rank, the parochial clergy have not always been able to abstain from partisanship, and, where they have been partisans, it has not commonly been on the side of labour. Notwithstanding their general and exemplary devotion to parochial duty, this has tended to stimulate a feeling in favour of the disestablishment of the Church. Of this sentiment I cannot measure the breadth or depth; but it may be found to form a real ingredient in the general question.”—MR. GLADSTONE.

THERE are few things, at the present moment, the significance of which, to my mind, Churchmen are more constrained to recognise than

the attitude of the labouring population towards the Established Church. Signs of the times are monitors which we, as Christians, cannot ignore without disloyalty. The popularity of the Church in the rural districts has been, until quite lately, a fact which few people have been disposed to challenge. It was well known, of course, that amongst the working men of our large manufacturing towns the policy of Disestablishment had numerous supporters, but that policy was confidently regarded as having few adherents among the cultivators of the soil. To-day I am afraid we have no such ground for confidence. In the November number of the *Liberator*, the organ of the Liberation Society, there are a series of reports from the authorised agents of the Labourers' Union, purporting to give the feeling of the labourers throughout the various counties of England, on the subject of Disestablishment. That feeling is asserted to be almost entirely antagonistic to

the Church. I will quote from only one report, which is however a fair sample both of the tone and of the opinion of the rest. The delegate in the Norfolk district writes thus:—"I have no doubt but that there are some who would stick to the parsons for blankets and broth, but my opinion is the majority go in for Disestablishment."

Discount as you may these reports as the evidence of prejudiced witnesses, there will yet remain much which is only too easily corroborated in quite other directions. The columns of the *Guardian* newspaper have during this last year or two, been continually open to the complaints of country parsons on the alienation of their labouring parishioners and discussions as to the best means of bringing them back into the true fold. Indeed, if our bishop himself had been present to-day, as some of us had ventured to wish, I have little doubt that he would have been able to show us how amply justified was his

own very evident uneasiness on this subject, by the answers which he had received from his Rural Deans last year, in reply to his own direct inquiries.

The importance of the subject, therefore, which somewhat reluctantly, at the request of the Committee, I have undertaken to introduce, I think you will agree with me is undeniable. There are few of us, I suppose, who would argue that the Establishment should be maintained other than for the good of the persons who compose it. It is not an end in itself, but a means. When once it can be proved that as a means towards an end,—the general good of the country,—it has ceased to be beneficial, it will be of little use to prove that the end for which it was originally designed was well intentioned. Final judgments are always by actual results, not by original purposes. To prove, therefore, that the only class for whom of all others the Established Church has so often been upheld as a necessity are ceasing to accept her good

offices, is to make Disestablishment a question of the very near future indeed.

I confess, however, I am somewhat ashamed to press the importance of this subject on your attention by such arguments as these. We are indeed members of the Church of England, loyal, I trust, to the principles of the Establishment. But we are members also, do not let us forget it, of the Church of Christ. And it would be, indeed, disloyalty to Him did we ever cease to remember that his Church must be the Church of the Poor. When Christ came He came as a poor man in the outward rank of an artisan, whom the common people heard gladly. He distinctly took the social side of the poor as against the rich. There is no fact more removed from controversy than this, that Christianity arose out of the common people, and was intended in their interest. In theory, at least, the Christian Church is essentially democratic, "Democracy being indeed," as has been truly said, "only Christianity applied to the principles

of our every-day life." More than all other dogmas I am tempted almost to say the *articulus stantis aut cadentis Ecclesiae* is the *Championship of the Poor*. That as a body the country clergy have been benevolent, kindly and charitable goes, of course, without saying. Their philanthropic intentions have been for the most part admirable. Coal clubs, blankets, tracts, soup, castor oil, doles of all kinds, these have been given with a free hand. But what has been the nett result? I confess myself to some embarrassment when I am asked by Joseph Arch this question, "You clergy of the Established Church have had the agricultural labourers in hand at any rate for 300 years to do pretty much what you liked with, and what have you made of them?" Until quite lately could the answer be anything but this—A class of men, the stolid helplessness of whose ignorance has become proverbial. I know very well that there is a good deal of literary cant in the kind of *Saturday Review* description of "the wretched,

uncared-for, untaught clod of bovine gaze, and clouded mind, living manifestly in fear of God and the squire." Yet I am afraid there is some truth at the bottom of it. At least, there is this undeniable fact, that the agricultural labourer had come to be a man without independence and without aspiration, doomed as the Corn Law rhymer sings,

" To slave while there is strength—in age the workhouse,
A parish shell at last, and the little bell
Tolled hastily for a pauper's funeral."

Now I would not for a moment seem to imply that the country clergy have not sympathised deeply with this unhappy state of affairs, and have honestly wished to improve it. But on the whole, surely we cannot but acknowledge that as regards any general amelioration in the condition of the labourers we country clergy have miserably failed. And failed, as it appears to me, for this reason, that we have been too much busied in trying to

alleviate particular symptoms of social distress rather than dealing with its general causes. "Blankets and broth," as our delegate in the alliterative rudeness of his ingratitude terms it, we perhaps did not always remember are not the only factors of social regeneration. Our philanthropic intentions, as I said, have been most admirable. But then, it is so often in philanthropy the good intentions, the blunders perpetrated in the excess of our philanthropic zeal that do so much harm. It was not benevolence but justice that was mainly wanted. Doles too often only make beggars, and relief hypocrites.

It is true it may be said that there was nothing but charity possible, inasmuch as anything else would imply an interference with economic laws, with which we as clergy are not concerned. Well, even grant that (which I do not), for that very reason, I venture to think, when a great spontaneous movement did arise among the labourers themselves, making possible

the revision of those wide economic and social conditions which lie at the root of the evils we have so long and so unavailingly deplored, should we have welcomed it heartily and generously.

But, as I say, I do not grant that the clergy have no concern with the economic side of the question; and for this reason, that the economic side is a distinctly moral side. The question of wages is a moral question. I do not, of course, mean to say that we, as clergy, ought to have anything to do with the mere higgling of the market, but we have every right, I think, to protest, and that not only in general terms, against a rate of wages which imperils the decency, and the order, and the civilisation of our parishes. As things go at present, I cannot at all understand how it is in any way possible to live a moral life on anything less than 20s. a week. I doubt very much whether I could do it myself on 30s. How any clergyman knowing, as he cannot fail

to know, the “total defiance of even savage notions of decency and health” which the existing cottage accommodation in most of our villages implies, can rest satisfied to wait patiently for the slow action of the so-called natural laws of supply and demand, passes my comprehension.

“The question for a moral and spiritual teacher is not, Will this unsettle the community? or Will it stir up heartburning, and render it very difficult to live in peace?—for we have all of us heard of a Teacher ‘who came not to bring peace on earth but a sword.’ The question for a moral and spiritual teacher is, Must there be a radical change of some kind before a better life can be lived at all? If so, at any risk of setting class against class, of social heartburnings, of disturbed social conditions, the change must be attempted.”

For my own part then I desire to say distinctly, that the question of more wages in our country districts is a moral question, and that

it is the duty of the Church to sympathise at least with any agency which is likely to make that *sine qua non* of a higher moral condition possible.

There is much I should have thought in the idea of the Labourers' Union which ought to gain the sympathy of a minister of Christ. An association in which the fundamental rule is that the members shall not consider each man his own, but every man another's wealth, of which the central spirit is that each shall contribute to the common welfare, and shall at all costs postpone his own advantage to the common good, has at least some elements which are not far from the principles of the kingdom of God. I am quite well aware that the ways and means by which Trades' Unions have in some cases endeavoured to gain their ends have been such as to be simply detestable. I could not live for three years in Sheffield without hearing something of the bad side of Unionism. But friendship with many trades' unionists made me

also conversant with the fact that the bad side was by no means the only side. There is a good side too; and one which in my opinion largely predominates. In the case of the Agricultural Union the absence of all illegitimate and disorderly action has been most remarkable. I do not mean to say that there has not been a certain amount of soreness and even strife created between employers and employed. That is of course to be regretted, and where in any case it has been the result of virulent and immoderate language either on one side or the other, it is our duty openly and fearlessly to denounce it. But to some extent the collision of interests was inevitable. We can have no good in this world without evil. It is idle and childish to shut our eyes to the light, because we cannot have it without shadow. It is sheer nonsense to remind us, as so many do, that to set class against class is an evil. Of course it is. Nobody in their senses would deny it, least of all I hope would a Christian minister,

whose highest social ambition it must ever be to weld all classes of his parishioners together in a bond of common fellowship. But it may be an evil which at times is inevitable. A thunderstorm sets element against element, and to that extent is distinctly an evil, but it leaves results behind which are in the majority of cases most beneficent. There have been few reforms in fact, whether in Church or State, from the first preaching of Christianity itself down to the last Reform Bill, which have not been obnoxious to this argument. There is nothing in the Bible, remember, nothing certainly in our Master's example, which would teach his ministers to be peace-at-any-price men; and therefore, for my part, I cannot but cordially rejoice at the progress of the Labourers' Union, and give it such humble countenance as I am able; while, at the same time, I deeply regret that so many of my brethren—men, I am ready to confess, before whose earnestness and devotion in other ways I must bow my head for shame—

can regard it with nothing but dislike and suspicion.

But I must not forget that I am addressing others besides my brother clergy. I fear I may have already trespassed too far upon the proverbially vast good nature of the British farmer. At least he may very fairly ask me, Can you give me any proof that the Labourers' Union, which to me individually at least has been a most disagreeable experience, has during the five years of its existence been of any practical material benefit to the country at large?

Well. If I were to say that the N.A.L.U. had during five years reduced pauperism and crime in this country more than all that Governments have done during the last thirty years, I suppose you would not believe me, but I really should like to ask you to consider a piece of evidence, which you may find in the *Times* newspaper of Saturday last (December 8th, 1877). I allude to the review of the sixth

annual report of the Local Government Board. You see I am not proposing to refer you to either the assertion of some blatant demagogue or even some able philanthropist, but to the incontestable witness of dry figures. If you will examine those returns you will find that for fifteen years prior to the year 1872 there was a steady annual increase in the number of paupers in almost every county of England. In the year 1872 the number had reached a total of 1,081,926. In that year however, which I beg you to mark was also the year which saw the birth of the labour agitation, the tide commenced to set in the other direction. Last year the numbers were 749,593, making a total reduction in five years of nearly 400,000. During the same period there has been a steady decrease in the number of inmates of our county prisons. It was stated in the House of Commons last year by Mr. Pell, that there were no less than sixty prisons which could be closed. There is one thing, however, which strikes me

as a little remarkable about these statistics, that the diminution in the poor-rates is in no degree proportionate to the diminution in the number of paupers. The paupers have decreased 40 per cent.; the cost of relieving them only 4 per cent. If I claim the 40 per cent. reduction to the beneficent action of the Labourers' Union, I may fairly leave you, I think, to apportion in the proper quarters the comparative blame which is implied in only 4 per cent.

I might speak of other results in the growth of a spirit of independence, of self-reliance, energy, enterprise, which the Union has directly tended to foster, but I leave these figures to speak for themselves.

There is another question, however, which we who are interested in promoting good Churchmanship among our labouring fellow-parishioners ought not to leave out of consideration. During the last two years the labourers have shown considerable interest in the conduct of the parish vestries. In many parishes they have attended

in large numbers, and have claimed to vote in the election of parish officers. In several instances they have succeeded in carrying their own candidates. In the great majority of cases, however, I am afraid their attempt to exercise the parish franchise has received but scanty welcome from the old-established authorities. In some cases their right has been openly contested. Two notorious cases of this kind, in which the labourers were eventually victorious, occurred in our own county last year. I confess few things have been more humiliating to me to read than the reports of the Easter Vestries of this year, given in the columns of the *English Labourer*, and headed, "The Battle of the Vestries—Parsons on Guard;" knowing, as I did, that the battle was one in which the poor were fighting in defence of their most undoubted rights against the rich, and that the enemies against which the parsons were supposed to be on guard were their own parishioners. Now I would venture to ask whether

such an attitude is not altogether most mistaken and unfortunate ?

As to their legal right to the parish franchise there is absolutely no doubt. It will be in the recollection probably of most of you, that at the beginning of this year the Committee of the Church Defence Institution, seeing, as they expressed it, "the great interest that existed in the country respecting the approaching election of churchwardens at the Easter Vestries," procured a counsel's opinion on the subject. The decision of Messrs. Stephens and Greene was this : "That householders whose rates are paid for them by their landlords are, by the 32nd and 33rd Vic. cap. 41, in the like position in respect of their qualification to vote as if they paid the full rates themselves, and are entitled to have their names on the rate-book, and, whether their names are on the rate-book or not, are qualified to vote."

But surely a mandamus from the Court of Queen's Bench ought not to be necessary to

compel Churchmen to welcome this new-born interest of the labourers in public affairs! There was a time in the history of the Church of England when she played no unimportant part in the development of popular liberty. Shall it be said that the memory of those early days has entirely departed?

But if the parish franchise, the exercise of which is already the labourer's legal right, is distinctly a Church question, there are not those wanting to tell us that the county franchise, concerning which we have heard so much lately, is rapidly becoming a Church question too. I remember reading not very many weeks ago in the *Guardian* newspaper a letter from a Norfolk Vicar, in which he stated plainly his opinion that "the agitation for the franchise was simply to overturn the Church and the parson." His letter was followed by many others from different parts of the country, clearly proving that there were not a few country parsons who shared his opinion. To any one, however, who was

present, as I was, both at the magnificent demonstrations of agricultural labourers last year at Exeter and St. James's Halls, and at the debate in the House of Commons, followed by the almost unanimous vote of the Liberal party in support of Mr. Trevelyan's motion, will hardly accept that as a fair account of the County Franchise agitation. I listened with great attention to all the speeches made on those occasions, and certainly I heard nothing which argued that the prospect of Church Disestablishment was the sole, or even the prominent element, in the demand for the county vote. I heard much in Mr. Bright's speech about the results in previous years of the extension of the borough franchise, about the logical injustice of withholding the borough and county vote from a million and a half of voters whose fellows are within the constitution, about the Tenure of Land, about County Boards, about the election of Magistrates and Poor Law Guardians, about the Burials Bill,—but I did not hear one word about

overturning the Church and the parson. These were the subjects, and not Disestablishment, which furnished the chief arguments of the speakers both at the Demonstration meetings and also in Parliament ; and these are the subjects which give strength to the County Franchise agitation. It is true that at the Exeter Hall meeting some expression was given to the feeling that the country clergy are as a rule out of sympathy with the aims and objects of the Labourers' Union. On the other hand, there was much also to show, that where the clergy had made an effort to understand and sympathise with the social and political aspirations of the men, they had ever met with cordiality and good feeling. For myself, at any rate, I do not wish for warmer or more devoted friends than I am happy to possess among my labouring parishioners, and certainly the generous welcome which the 2,000 delegates gave me—an unknown country parson—when I supported Mr. Trevelyan's motion at St. James's Hall last

May, did much to convince me that mine need be no exceptional case.

I have little time, even if this were quite the place, to answer the objections usually advanced against granting the county vote to the labourers. One question only, which is very commonly asked, I will briefly answer. It is said, How do you expect the condition of the labourers is likely to be improved by the exercise of the county vote? I am quite well aware that improvement by means of self-education is infinitely more solid than improvement forced on by outside legislation. But I hold that this great movement during the last four years is one of the most splendid instances of self-education that the country has ever seen. And that is also, I think, the telling answer to those who say that the labourer is not sufficiently educated to be put into possession of the county vote. The only fair educational test is political activity and intelligent appreciation of his own class needs. A Tory farmer friend

of mine the other day summed up his objections to county franchise with quaint shrewdness, thus—"If I teaches my 'orses their power, who's to drive the team?" My answer to that was twofold. In the first place, I endeavoured to show my friend that horses and agricultural labourers were not quite the same kind of creature. And secondly, I pointed out to him that if his horses were not taught to use their power aright he would not be able to drive the team. And that would still be my answer to those who, like Mr. Goschen, put the same argument in rather more refined form. I think we should welcome the enfranchisement of the agricultural labourer, in the first place, because in giving him the vote we increase his self-respect, which is the first step in raising him from the condition of an eating, drinking, and toiling *animal* to the true dignity of a working *man*; and secondly, because we believe that the worth, tenacity, endurance, sobriety of judgment, and law-abiding spirit which he has manifested

so conspicuously during the course of the last five years' agitation, will be a source of national strength, when once he is brought within the pale of the constitution, as it is an undoubted source of danger while he is left outside.

If I had not already exhausted your patience I should have attempted to say something about the more ordinary agencies by which the Church seeks to influence the labouring population. This one word only will I venture to say finally: *The first step in all plans for the welfare, social, economic, or religious, of the rural poor, is to make possible to them, before all else, the exercise of that most democratic, yet most Christian virtue, Hopeliness.* "Village life is dull;"—I quote the words of Dr. Brydges in a recent lecture published in *The Fortnightly Review*: "in London, with its vile lodgings and precarious struggle for existence, there is excitement—there is life for the brain. There is a rich multiform drama every Saturday night in the Whitechapel road—flaring gas-lights, strong

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